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THE "PRACTICE" OF MOTHER CLARE FEY

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J. M. J.

"All for Jesus,
for Jesus alone!"

THE "PRACTICE" OF MOTHER CLARE FEY

Foundress of the Congregation of the Poor Child Jesus

A GUIDE TO A MORE CLOSE UNION WITH THE GOD OF OUR ALTARS

TRANSLATED BY A MEMBER OF THE CONGREGATION

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In conformity to the Decree of Pope Urban VIII, the Translator declares that all that is written in this " Practice " of Mother Clare Fey is employed in a purely historical sense, and that all the facts and doctrines in this book are submitted without reserve to the judgement of the Apostolic See.

NIHIL OBSTAT:
G. H. JOYCE, S.J.
Censor deputatus.

IMPRIMATUR:
EDM. CAN. SURMONT
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FOREWORD

At the close of the year 1912, a priest of great spirituality, and experienced in the training of souls, was on a visit to the convent of the Poor Child Jesus at Godesberg on the Rhine, to supply the place of its chaplain. The *Life of Mother Clare Fey* having been put into his hands, he was soon deep in its study. The Sisters, knowing this, expressed a wish that he would tell them some of his thoughts about their Mother and Foundress. He consented, and gave them a conference on what he termed the " Practice " of Mother Clare Fey. This " Practice " he laid before them as the fundamental thought of the spiritual life of their revered Foundress.

In 1913 the conference was given to the Press. For the centenary of the birth of the Foundress—April 11, 1915—a second, enlarged edition appeared, which found a wide circulation outside the convent; as did also a Dutch translation by the Rev. P. G. Gorris, S.J.

This present new edition is intended for all souls, whether in the cloister or in the world, whose privilege it has been to choose the service of the eucharistic God as their portion. To them this unpretentious little book is offered with the simple and the great thoughts of a soul who was all love for the divine Redeemer hidden in the adorable Sacrament; and it is offered with the request to take, read, and practise !

Take, read, and practise ! Read slowly, meditatively, a little at a time ! It is best to make use of the meditations as they are given. Then practise what has been read, quietly and perseveringly. Already after the first few weeks it will be found that the " Practice " becomes a cherished custom, and later on a real and a sweet necessity.

THE EDITOR.

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THE "PRACTICE" OF MOTHER CLARE FEY

I

MOTHER CLARE FEY AND HER "PRACTICE"

Mary Luise Christine *Clare* Fey was born in Aix-la-Chapelle, on April 11, 1815, of a good old Catholic family, and was baptised on the same day. Before she was five years old her excellent father died (January 31, 1820), after a sad, lingering illness of two years.

His widow directed the education of her two sons and three daughters as a truly Christian mother. Clare, together with her younger sister Catherine, visited a school conducted by some French nuns, and later on, St Leonard's High School in the city. On June 14, 1827, the feast of Corpus Christi, Clare and her sister made their first Communion, and on July 7 of the same year they were confirmed. In 1830, Clare's younger brother, Andrew, was ordained priest, and three years later her elder brother, Joseph, entered the congregation of the Redemptorist Fathers.

The life which Clare led after leaving St Leonard's was indeed a happy one; the pious Christian spirit of her parental home taking still deeper root in her heart as she grew up to womanhood. She assisted in the household with generous affection, denying herself by taking part in those occupations which were not to her taste. At the same time her education was continued. She read much, not, indeed, novels and romances, but the sacred Scriptures, the lives and teaching of the saints, and other spiritual books. Music and singing were cultivated but

dancing was not learnt. Her artistic talent displayed itself in working for the Altar of the parish church.

Clare's daily life was distinguished by two special virtues: real, true piety and Christian charity. Each morning at six o'clock she was at holy Mass and frequently received Holy Communion. Every week saw her at Confession. Regarding faults, she exercised a tender conscientiousness especially with regard to speaking of others. "Oh! do not let us commit sin, I beg of you!" were the words with which she put an end to all conversation against charity. From her earliest childhood she had ever had a special love for the poor and the sick, and her tender kindness and generosity towards them increased with her years. Even her daily walks with her sister and her friends—who were of the same mind as herself—had generally the secondary object of visiting the poor and afflicted, or some distant church.

This pious striving was soon to take a distinct course. At that time the condition of the children in the large industrial city of Aix-la-Chapelle was a deplorable one; they ran wild in the streets, without schooling or care. Many people sighed over it but no one laid hand on the crying need. At last the earnest priests of the city and the charitable ladies who met on Sunday evenings in Mrs. Fey's house for the purpose of consulting together as to how the sad state of things could be mended, came to the conclusion that it was imperative for schools to be opened for these poor and utterly neglected children. At the instigation of Clare's brother, who was now curate at the parish church of St Paul's, the ladies resolved to open a school themselves and that at once, without any delay. On February 3, 1837, the resolve was carried into effect, Clare being then twenty-two years of age.

In the circle of the "holy young ladies," as the people of Aix-la-Chapelle sometimes styled them, three were especially conspicuous: Anna von Lommessen, who later became a religious of the Sacred Heart; Pauline von

Mallinckrodt, afterwards Foundress of a religious congregation; and Francisca Schervier who later founded the congregation of the " Poor Sisters of St Francis." Both of these congregations are now flourishing, especially in America. But it was the delicate and fragile Clare who was the most distinguished among all, her quietness, prudence and meekness captivating the hearts of her companions and of the children, exercising an unsought-for and therefore all the more deep and lasting influence upon them. She was spoken of by others as the " chief person " of the undertaking.

The judgement of the world regarding the " holy young ladies " was not at first exactly favourable ! " They surely have gone crazy !" said those of strong opinions. Quieter natures said: " Young girls must have some amusement. When they tire of it, they will give it up of themselves."

But they did not tire of it, nor did they give it up. The undertaking developed wonderfully, and imperceptibly led to the founding of a new religious congregation. As we so often read in the history of religious congregations, so we see here the sure and gentle direction of the divine Spirit, who chooses that which is small and hidden, and quietly and silently draws great things from it.

On February 1, 1844, Clare left her parental home and with three of her friends began a community life. She was the Superior without being elected. " There was nothing to elect," said one of the first four Sisters later on, " the Mother was there. Even in former years each one went to her with everything that needed counsel or that troubled them." Life in the little house became at once conventual. On October 6, 1844, the vows were taken, but only privately. In December, 1845, Clare went to Berlin, accompanied by one of her Sisters, to seek the approbation of the State for her undertaking; she also had an audience with the Queen.

On December 11, 1847, after various difficulties had arisen and had been successfully combated, the approbation of the State was obtained, and on January 28, 1848, the Archbishop of Cologne, John of Geissel, bestowed upon the Foundation the ecclesiastical approbation. In 1850, on July 28, Clare was elected General Superior, according to the provisionally approved statutes. The provisional approbation of the congregation was obtained from Rome itself, on July 11, 1862. The final approbation by Pope Pius IX took place by a Decree of May 12, 1869. The congregation which twenty-five years before had begun with four Sisters and a little Poor School, now numbered twenty-six houses with six hundred Sisters.

The disorder and troubles caused by the Kulturkampf prevented further necessary steps being taken for the extension of the congregation and for laying the Rule before Rome, until 1880. The approbation then followed, by a Decree of April 1, 1881; for seven years only at first, for Holy Church proceeds in such cases with wise prudence and caution. On June 15, 1888, followed the final approbation. It was very remarkable that all connected with this great step, took place on the five Fridays of the month of the Sacred Heart. On the first Friday, the Holy Father in an audience approved the congregation, on the second Friday, the feast of the Sacred Heart, the congregation was solemnly consecrated to this divine Heart, and on the same afternoon came a telegram from Rome with the news of the approbation; on the third Friday, June 15, the Sacred Congregation signed the Rule; on the fourth Friday, June 22, the Rule was received from Rome by the Bishop of Roermond; and on the fifth Friday the Rule was received in the Mother house. Thus from the goodness of the divine Heart of Jesus, Mother Clare's work obtained its completion.

The exterior activity of the congregation made rapid progress. The name of the "Poor Child Jesus" was distinctly emphasised in the statutes: and to take up poor,

forsaken, and destitute children was the object of the Foundation. But without anyone desiring it, and indeed, even against the original will of the Foundress to which she held most firmly, the circumstances of the times urged the undertaking of the higher education of girls. A beginning was made with the high school in Neuss and in Echternach (Luxemburg), which were soon followed by others. It was then natural that the congregation, following the latest course of development, should erect educational establishments nearer to Aix-la-Chapelle—in Cologne, Ehrenfeld, Dusseldorf, Godesberg and Neuss. The activity of the congregation has, in consequence, become many-sided and abundant. We find in the different foundations schools for orphans, poor schools, nursery schools, kindergarten, recreation halls for the supervision of poor boys and girls after school hours in the afternoon, technical schools, commercial courses, different grades of high schools, practical housekeeping schools, " homes " for lady students, business girls, etc. In many of the houses of the congregation, girls of the working classes above school age are trained for domestic servants.

Another branch of activity is church embroidery, which by theoretical and practical study has attained a world-wide renown, helped on as it was by the constant support and encouragement of the Foundress, who possessed great artistic skill. But all this many-sided activity is united in the spirit of the Poor Child Jesus which penetrates and animates all. " To lead to Jesus " is the one great object.

All that was effected by prayer, work, and suffering from 1844 to 1888 cannot be even alluded to in this short sketch; therefore the reader is referred to the *Life of Mother Clare Fey of the Poor Child Jesus*, which appeared in 1923 (Burns Oates and Washbourne). This work gives a clear idea of the difficulties, labours and toils that Mother Clare went through in founding and extending her con-

gregation, which at the present day numbers thirty-eight houses, in Austria, America, Belgium, England, France, Germany, Holland, and Luxemburg, each foundation carrying on a successful activity. It also introduces us into the inner life of the revered Mother, shows how she became what she was, how the Spirit of God guided her from childhood, how he assisted her on the way of union with her adorable Saviour, and how her character became ever more and more noble, developing itself with perfect harmony, uniting itself to God in all things.

This beautiful life ended in a beautiful death. On May 8, 1894, in perfect calm and peace she gave up her precious soul into the hands of its Creator, in Loreto House in Simpelveld, Holland, where she had laboured since September 1, 1878, after the Government had forced her to give up the Mother house in Aix-la-Chapelle. She did, indeed, die in the odour of sanctity. The Bishop of Roermond, to whose diocese the Mother house belongs, says in a beautiful letter of condolence to the Sisters: " . . . She was a living example of strong faith, of rare piety, of deep religious spirit—in short, of all religious and conventual virtues. Therefore, with the firmest confidence we may trust that on leaving her poor cell in Loreto House she was admitted at once to the eternal nuptials by her divine Spouse." The process of beatification was introduced in 1916.

We can say that the life of Mother Clare has its own special mystery. Her sanctity, her life of union with God has a unique stamp. Her calmness and sureness in every emergency, her strength and perseverance in enduring trials of every kind, indeed, all that she became before man and before God had its source in a single practice which she kept up for nearly sixty years. And this practice, which continued to develop ever more and more, and which brought forth ever richer and more abundant fruit, was the practice of living in the presence of God, in the presence of the sacramental God of our Altars.

II

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE " PRACTICE " FOR MOTHER CLARE

It is not always given to us to be able to observe with exactness the souls of God's chosen servants; in fact, it is comparatively seldom in the lives of the saints that one can follow the secret of the heart, the root of the inner life from its first bud to its blossom and its ripe fruit, as in the life of Mother Clare. And we find that it is the " Practice" which gives to this life its mysterious power of attraction. It is the " centre of her entire thought and life. All her other distinguished virtues took their root in this, and it was the fundamental virtue which she most expressly desired to see impressed upon her Sisters by the Rule of the congregation." (Otto Pfulf, S.J.)

The beginning of the " Practice " goes back to the time of 1835, when St Teresa was brought more especially into the life of Mother Clare by the Redemptorist Fathers, particularly by her brother, Father Joseph Fey, and also by the Carmelite nuns with whom she was intimate. Through this great teacher of the interior life she became acquainted with the teaching of the *continual union with God.*

The " Practice " was greatly furthered under the direction of her confessor, Father Sartorius, who was her director from 1841. This saintly priest lived, we might say, in St Francis de Sales, to whose teaching, with regard to recollection in God, St Teresa had given such powerful encouragement. With Mother Clare, this practice of all the saints which she owed in a twofold manner to St Teresa, was to receive an entirely unique and characteristic stamp. It was the *walking before the God of our Altars*, the *eucharistic recollection* which gave her life its

main support and its line of direction, as it were, and which led her, about the year 1858, to that happy "place of rest at the feet of the Lord" which, in spite of interior trials and exterior visitations, remained ever the delight of her soul. It sounds like the hymn of jubilation of a contemplating mystic, like a Gertrude or Hildegarde, when in 1867 she opens her soul to her director and says: "Formerly it was more the time of seeking; but now we have found! During long, long years we sought, for the treasure was exceeding great and precious. We sought long, but we always found sufficient to make us seek again and again. Now it is more the time of possessing, of beholding, the time of joy! The ocean lies spread out before our eyes; let us enter it, let us plunge into it! Let us lose ourselves in God and forget ourselves entirely so that we may become the servant of all in perfect love."

Such is the language of the saints: To love God, to forget one's self, to love one's neighbour! That Mother Clare could speak this language with perfect truth, she owed to her "Practice." And how prophetic it sounds when on August 12, 1837, the feast of St Clare, her brother Joseph in writing to congratulate her, extols her holy patroness in the words: "Her tender devotion to the most holy Sacrament was of special consequence for her spiritual life. Therefore let us beg of her to obtain this devotion for us also, for you and for me. It is wonderful how things become changed when one has love for the Blessed Sacrament; everything then becomes easier, one is more free and courageous."

This devotion to the Blessed Sacrament did wonderful things in Clare: the modest, retiring maiden (at that time twenty-two years of age) became the Foundress of a flourishing congregation and the spiritual Mother and guide of thousands of souls. We can say of her what she once said of St Catherine of Siena: "Our Lord whispered in her ear, 'Think of me and I will think of thee,' and she understood these words, and held her divine Spouse

fast with all the ardour of her loving heart; and oh! what fruit did she bring forth through the almighty one on whom she leaned! Such was the weak virgin who in the depths of her heart knew nothing but Christ our Lord, who thought only of him, and allowed herself in all things to be guided by him."

And so in the same way Mother Clare became an image of her holy patroness, another Clare with the Monstrance! That which she once said with childlike reverence of her holy patroness may well be referred to herself and placed at the beginning of this modest instruction on the "Practice." "*Go to-day into the school of St Clare, my soul, she will teach thee all wisdom ;* she will dissolve thy doubts, and offer thee a consolation such as heaven alone possesses. Behold her, the poorest and the richest, the most humble and the most sublime! . . . See how she stands before thee as a humble serving-maid; but when she raises her eyes and fixes them upon the 'Highest Good' which she carries in her hands, they flash fire. . . ."

"Surrender thyself, timid soul," says St Clare, "see and make use of the treasure I show to thee, which thou canst find and possess at every moment. *Ecce Agnus Dei*, 'Behold the Lamb of God!' What more canst thou wish for in the whole world? May he be thy companion in solitude, thy protector along the path of life, thy bosom Friend when all forsake thee, thy comfort when thou art pained and wounded, thy helper in every circumstance of thy life, thy refuge in all difficulties and dangers! Let him be all in all to thee, let him take the place of all—father and mother, brother and sister, friend and spouse."

"Be docile then, my soul! Let thyself be comforted, follow St Clare, who while walking through this vale of tears, experienced in herself the truth of all she says to thee now."

III

THE THEORY OF THE " PRACTICE "

THE " Practice " of Mother Clare Fey is first of all the walking in God's presence. What her conception of this was, she has beautifully explained in a meditation of April 18, 1849, which she titles: " The Walking in God's Presence: the Easiest, Surest, Quickest Means to Perfection." She refers to the words which God spoke to Abraham: " Walk before me and be perfect " (Gen. xvii 1). This fundamental meditation is here given fully, for Mother Clare is truly the instructor, the teacher of the " Practice." Let us listen to her words.

" It is a truth of faith," she says, " that God is everywhere present. If we ascend into heaven, or if we descend into hell, or if we go to the uttermost parts of the sea, everywhere do we find our God and Lord (Ps. cxxxviii 8); but nearest of all is he to the soul of man, which he has created after his own image and likeness, and which has received life, existence, from his breath. It is an almost overpowering thought that the almighty God, whose throne is the heavens, and whose footstool the earth, dwells in our inmost heart! If we believe this with firm and lively faith, must not our hearts be filled with unutterable consolation and joy? He whom the heavens cannot contain (3 Kings viii 27) he who fills the heaven of heavens with rapturous jubilee and bliss, has chosen our poor miserable hearts as his throne. O my soul, what could be more comforting!

" But what ought this divine Presence to *effect* within us? If we are thoroughly penetrated with it, and bear the memory of it everywhere with us, how pure ought not our daily life to be; how prudent, how careful our

conduct! And what strength for good ought we not to draw from this divine union! If your best friend whom you love was always at your side, would you—or could you —do anything in his sight that could offend or displease him? Surely not! If then you consider that your God, your Lord, never moves from your side, how perfect must not your conduct be! How pure and holy the thoughts that you think before him; how careful the words that you speak before him; how perfect the works that you do before him!

"By means of this constant thought have the saints attained to sanctity. St Francis de Sales, according to the testimony of one who knew his soul, was always in the closest union of love with his Lord. The Beloved was ever present to his mind. The darkness of the night had nothing of dread for him; on the contrary, it was dear to him on account of this sweet Presence, which he could then enjoy more undisturbed, as he expresses himself. What *outward effect* did the thought of this Presence have upon the saints? We have only to consider what that testimony was which the friends of St Francis gave who observed him when he thought he was alone. They said they never saw him lean back in a chair, never cross one foot over the other, but at all times his deportment was reverential, as that of a man who finds himself in presence of a great king.

"O my soul, thou hast the same means at thy command as the saints had; wilt thou not begin to make use of them? Thy God is in thee as he was in them; wilt thou not draw profit from this divine Presence, great profit, superabundant gain? Thou hast two eyes; with the left thou shouldst look upon thy work, the work of thy vocation, but the right thou shouldst keep immovably fixed on thy Spouse. Thou hast two hands; with the one thou shouldst for love's sake work in the service of love, but with the other thou shouldst hold firmly to thy Lord, cling to him and never let him go. Thou hast two ears; the one should

be open to the needs of thy neighbour, but the other should constantly listen to the voice of the Beloved who dwells in thee (*Cant. of Cant.* v 2).

" O my soul, thus ought it to be ! But how wilt thou attain to this ? Thou must strive, must exert all thy powers to obtain gradually this blissful custom. Every morning thou must resolve on this practice, and at midday and evening thou must ask thyself if, perhaps, *one half-hour* has gone by during which thou hast not thought of thy Lord; and if thou hast left him long alone thou must ask his pardon. But the surest, and the shortest means of obtaining this practice is *that thou really love thy Lord ;* because if thou lovest him faithfully, thou wilt also think of him faithfully and constantly; for where thy treasure is, there also is thy heart (Matt. vi 21). Moreover, my soul, thou must exercise this practice without constraint or unquietness, for it is a gift of the divine Spirit, who requires a gentle, meek, and humble heart in order to fill it with his grace."*

This instruction on the " Practice " given by the revered Foundress when she was but thirty-four years of age is a real masterpiece. In simple but beautiful language she teaches the highest wisdom with such clearness and prudence that one wonders again and again at the depth and abundance of ideas that she has brought together in so few words. Each one who desires to take

* The Dutch Translator makes here the following excellent remark: " This last warning against excess of zeal should be taken very seriously, especially by beginners. To think definitely of the presence of God every half-hour, or even every hour, means great perfection, to which, *e.g.*, Mother Clare herself had attained. But even good religious in the midst of their manifold work will not easily attain to this. Even to strive after it is an excellent work; and if, in spite of striving, success is not obtained, this is no sign of lukewarmness. Let us be mindful of the devout Thomas à Kempis, who exhorts all to pray each day: " Help me, O Lord God, in my good purpose and strengthen me in thy service, and grant me grace to begin from this day forth " (*Imitation*, chap. xix).

up the "Practice" with earnestness is recommended to make use of this meditation frequently. Its great thoughts recur again and again. Those words of Holy Writ: "I set the Lord always in my sight: for he is at my right hand, that I be not moved" (Ps. xv 8), are very familiar to Mother Clare, and when she designates her "Practice" as keeping one's eyes fixed upon the Lord, the same beautiful thought expressed in Psalm xv is before her mind: "As the eyes of servants are on the hands of their masters, as the eyes of the handmaid are on the hands of her mistress, so are our eyes unto the Lord our God" (Ps. cxxii 2).

She says in a meditation on the last quoted words: "We are handmaids of Christ, and in truth we have a good Master, an excellent Master, the most perfect Lord and Master! The all-important thing is that we keep our eyes upon him as the handmaid keeps her eyes on the hands of her mistress. If we do this we shall learn from him and be perfect. On every occasion, therefore, whether it be on arising in the morning or retiring at night, at meals, etc., in recreation, at every work, at every fulfilment of duty, and more especially at prayer, we should ask ourselves: 'How would Jesus have acted in my place?' By acting thus we should have before our eyes the most perfect model of virtue by which to regulate our conduct. But especially when vexations and troubles come upon us, when, for instance, our neighbour tries our patience, we should quickly direct our eyes to the patient Lamb of God, from whom we must learn to be meek and humble of heart. If we are thus faithful in always looking towards the Lord we shall soon wear the livery of our Master, walking according to his example in sincere humility, love, and modesty" (Phil. iv 5).

In the same way she takes up those words of the Apocalypse (xx 4). "And they shall see his face;" and she says: "We also shall see him if in this present life we accustom ourselves to walk in faith before his face, looking

towards him who is the Lord and Master, exerting ourselves to become pleasing in his sight and avoiding everything that could in any way be displeasing to him."

Although the " Practice " of Mother Clare already appears as the expression of devoted love and fidelity to the most sublime Lord, as an incessant striving after the highest perfection, with the eyes of the soul fixed on God, its entirely unique character is given to it by its being not only the walking with God, but the walking with " God-with-us," Emmanuel, the God of the Altar. Mother Clare tells us herself: " The quintessence, the centre, is Jesus in the most holy Sacrament." She gives a complete instruction on this point in the explanation of the Redeemer's words of promise: " He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood abideth in me and I in him " (John vi 57).

With profound thought, and yet in simple, modest form, which is ever her own special way, she says: " Let us consider what wondrous promise our divine Lord makes to those who receive his sacred flesh and blood as food for their souls: ' He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, abideth in me and I in him.' Not in a transient manner will he dwell within us by Holy Communion; no, his dwelling in us is to be continual: he *abides* in us. The same Lord who enters into our heart in the early morning accompanies us with his grace throughout the whole day, and in the evening is still there to protect us through the night.

" An excellent means of performing our prayers and our actions in a perfect manner would undoubtedly be this: in everything we do, whether it be prayer or the work belonging to our vocation, to imagine we have just left the Communion rail and then to endeavour so to pray and to work as if we had just received our divine Lord. How careful we should then be in our conduct; how we should be on our guard against displeasing our divine Guest; how watchful we should be over our words and

our actions! How we should keep our eyes fixed upon the Friend who dwells in our inmost soul; how we should search that divine countenance to see if we are pleasing to him; how diligently we should fulfil our daily duties in his sight; with what attention and devotion we should say our prayers at his sacred feet! And in reality this is no imagination, it is truth; our divine Lord who came to us this morning is, as God, still in our heart. Let us then resolve that before commencing a prayer or work, we will go back to the divine Guest in our soul as if he had just entered there. This would be a powerful incentive to live according to his good pleasure, and to become ever more and more united to him."

This abiding of the divine Redeemer in us is a thought which frequently recurs, and Mother Clare sometimes presents it to us in a way that surprises us, but which is nevertheless so deeply true; as, for instance, in a meditation on St John of the Cross, where she says: "Jesus . . . comes to us so often in Holy Communion and remains spiritually in us as he himself says: 'He that eateth my flesh . . . abideth in me and I in him.' The ciborium is not the real dwelling-place of our divine Lord, he is only kept there in order that he may enter our heart; and it is from the Altar that he longs for our heart, the poor human heart which is his favourite abode. Like St John of the Cross and St Catherine of Siena, we also should make a little oratory of our heart in which our blessed Lord who came to us in the early morning, may be present with us at all times."

In a sentence of mystical depth and most sublime theological truth, Mother Clare gives us the deepest reason for the practice of the presence of God through the eucharistic recollection. "He who sees the Son sees the Father, and the Son is not alone but the Father is in him at all times, and also the Love, the Holy Spirit, proceeding from both. In this Sacrament therefore we possess the entire wealth of heaven, for through it the most Holy Trinity dwells in us."

She knows that it was the Second Person of the blessed Trinity alone who became man, lived, suffered and died for us; she knows that at the Consecration in the holy Mass, bread and wine become the flesh and blood of the Second Person alone; but she sees clearly, and tells us in the words of him who is present with his Godhead and Manhood, that where he is, there in a most special and unique manner dwells God the Father and the Holy Ghost, whose glorious temple is the most holy Manhood of Christ, whose Godhead is one and the same with that of the Son. The triune God is *omnipresent—i.e.*, present in all places; but especially is he said to be present in those places in which he particularly manifests his gracious presence. But his most sublime activity on earth is displayed by the triune God in the most holy Sacrament of the Altar, that wonder of divine omnipotence and wisdom, of pitying goodness and love. The sacramental Presence is effected and preserved in its wonderful continuance through a permanent miracle of the holy Trinity. The body and blood of Jesus Christ is then present, personally united with the Second Person only of the Godhead; but as the most glorious creation of the triune God, united personally with the Creator himself, it is the holy Temple of God, the Tabernacle of the Most High, the House of God, in whom dwells the fulness of the Godhead (*Litany of the Blessed Sacrament*). In the Blessed Sacrament we find indeed, the most holy Trinity: the Father, who is well-pleased in the Son present in this divine Sacrament, with whom he abides at all times; the Son present with flesh and blood, body and soul, humanity and divinity; and the Holy Ghost dwelling in the sacred humanity of Christ.

We will go back once more to the one grand thought which is ever in the mind of Mother Clare, and which she emphasises again and again. She meditates upon the words: " He that abideth in me and I in him, the same beareth much fruit;" and she makes the energetic application: " Whether we bear much fruit depends entirely

upon the flesh and blood of our Lord being the constant nourishment of our soul. We must take care that our divine Saviour is glad to remain with us when we have received him, and we must be careful not to content ourselves with spending but a short time in his company, and then going from him and giving ourselves up to all manner of distractions. Ah! no, this ought not to be! Our adorable Saviour desires so lovingly to remain in our soul, if we will but allow him a quiet little place there and not open the door to aught else. Why is it not our delight to be with him? Why do we not come back to him as often as we can during the day? Is it not from him that we must obtain strength for the fulfilling of our duties, and power against the enemies of our salvation? It is only when we remain in him and he in us that we can bring forth fruit for eternal life. We are poor and void of all good, of every virtue; but in him the highest perfection becomes our own, for in possessing him we possess all his virtues and merits." "Abide in me, and I in you" (John xv 4); "Abide in my love" (John xv 9). These are words of the divine Redeemer which in Mother Clare became in reality spirit and life.

The endeavours of the revered Foundress to hold fast to the presence of God within her, from one Communion to another, was the chief thought in her communications with her confessor; for him as for her it was *the* "*Practice*." Both saw in this the most pleasing, and at the same time, the most sure way to the highest perfection (Pfulf). In November, 1848, Mother Clare writes to him: "May Jesus live in our hearts, but always in the manner in which he comes to us through his most holy Sacrament. I beg it of him for the sake of his holy Name, and I beg of him that we *remain* with him; with him and in him and from him *live*." She once said: "The holy Sacrament of the Altar is the life of our souls. The more our desire, our devotion, our love for this most holy Mystery increases, the more we shall live, and the more vigorously shall we live."

IV

THE CARRYING OUT OF THE " PRACTICE "

It is not sufficient to have grasped, to have understood the " Practice " in its grand fundamental thought, it must be carried out; and they who desire to apply it practically, who desire to make it the firm foundation of their striving after perfection, should go to the school of Mother Clare, and strive to learn of her how to apply the one leading thought to the individual circumstances of life. We shall find that a number of individual applications of the practice will follow which, taken together, constitute that which we know as the " Practice " of Mother Clare Fey.

V

WHAT THE " PRACTICE " PRESUPPOSES

THE " Practice " presupposes: Devotion to the divine Redeemer in the most holy Sacrament.

This is taken for granted; it is in a certain measure the preliminary practice: tender devotion to the adorable Sacrament of the Altar, which before all consists in the practice of the three divine virtues with regard to the God hidden in the Blessed Sacrament; " faith, confidence, and love " Mother Clare beautifully expresses it, and she is never tired of referring to this essential point.

She requires *faith.* " Oh, omnipotence of the word of Jesus ! See, the priest holds bread in his hands, he speaks in the name of Jesus; ' This is my body,' and bread is no longer there, it is Jesus himself, Jesus our Saviour, our Life, the same who wept for us in the Crib, who died for us on the Cross ! Oh, omnipotence of the word of Jesus ! O Lord, thou dost work a greater wonder here among us than in the beginning, when by thy almighty Word heaven and earth were created, a greater wonder than when thou didst descend into the womb of the immaculate Virgin ! We see this unspeakable wonder daily, we experience it, we believe it, and—we remain cold ! Do we not often enter the holy place where it is accomplished, with less respect than we enter the house of mortal man ? What will become of us when the Lord demands an account of the Treasure confided to us in this holy Sacrament with which we could have practised usury for the next world ? (Matt. xxv 14-19).

Oh ! let us repent of our negligence, and strive to animate our faith anew. Verily, if our faith were but as a grain of mustard seed, we should, by means of this holy

Sacrifice, work wonders and remove mountains " (Matt. xvii 19).

In another meditation she considers the question which our divine Lord put to Martha: " Believest thou this ?" together with the answer: " Yea, Lord, I have believed that thou art Christ, the Son of the living God, who art come into this world " (John xi 26-27). Mother Clare, according to her wont, applies this to the Blessed Sacrament: " Our divine Lord in his holy Sacrament will work the same wonders among us as he worked at that time (the raising of Lazarus from the dead), and wonders greater still, wonders of grace. But in order to be able to work these wonders, he requires of us the same faith as he required of those for whom his wondrous deeds were accomplished. If our faith in the adorable Sacrament were truly lively, how all things would be changed ! No doubt, we sometimes wish we had lived at the time when our Lord walked upon earth, so that we might have been able to find comfort and help from him; but do not let us deceive ourselves; we have the same Lord who loves us with the same love with which he loved men in those days; and if our faith in him in this divine Sacrament is not a lively faith now, it would have been still weaker if we had seen him despised, mocked, and blasphemed. Then let us believe, firmly believe, that on the Altar really and truly present is Christ, the Son of the living God (Matt. xvi 16). Let us strive to be penetrated through and through with this faith."

Very pithy thoughts are to be found in the meditation on the words " Mystery of Faith " : " O Mystery of Faith ! bowed down to the dust we adore thee and offer to thee our weak understanding; we rejoice that thou art infinitely exalted beyond our powers of comprehension, our shortsightedness. We believe in thee, O Lord, more firmly than if we saw thee with our bodily eyes; for our eyes could deceive us, but thy word is truth " (John vi 69).

From faith proceeds *hope*, confidence. " When Holy

Church, the bride of Christ, is about to administer the most holy Sacrament to her faithful, she shows them their Bridegroom with the words: 'Behold the Lamb of God.' With these words she desires to invite all, to encourage all to draw near to the Lamb who takes away the sins of the world (John i 29). Oh! truly does the Church understand the sentiments of him who 'came not to destroy souls but to save' (Luke ix 56). Behold the Lamb of God who 'came not to judge the world but to save the world' (John xii 47). Behold the Lamb who redeems the sheep! (Sequence for Easter). Behold the Lamb that was slain (Apoc. v 12). Behold, the Lamb leads the sheep to his pastures, and will himself become their food!" (Ezech. xxxiv 14-15).

"When we call those happy who stood by the sacred Cross on the hill of Calvary, do we not call ourselves happy also? Is not the same precious Blood that flowed down upon those who stood round the Cross, sprinkled also upon us in the holy Sacrifice of the Mass? Can not we also draw near to Jesus, the Advocate of the New Covenant, and to the cleansing Blood that pleads more powerfully than the blood of Abel? Can we not daily draw near, daily cleanse ourselves from the sins and faults with which we daily defile ourselves? Can we not daily receive new graces, when with faith, confidence, and love we assist at holy Mass?" (Council of Trent, 22nd Session, chap. i 11).

Here then we have the motives for confidence. Let us now consider the exercise of confidence.

"If we seek our divine Lord in his holy Sacrament, there to place our needs before him, we shall find him each time just as our condition requires. If we are ill, he is there as the healer; if we are hungry, he is there as the dispenser of food; if we are tired and weary, we shall find him solitary, far from the noise and tumult of the world in order that we may be able to rest near him. If we are sorrowful, he became disconsolate in order to comfort us; if

we labour and are heavily burdened, we shall find him carrying his fearful Cross in order to relieve us of our load. Then let us fly at all times to the source of grace, to Jesus in the most holy Sacrament, and verily we shall experience the wonders of his mercy. Yes, truly, the divine Saviour hidden in the tabernacle will effect still more than this in the faithful, trustful soul ! ' He that eateth me, the same also shall live by me ' (John vi 58). ' He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also to walk even as he walked' (1 John ii 6). As soon as we begin to live by our Lord we also shall walk in the way of the Cross along which he walked, and we shall walk therein with courage and with trust."

" Do we not know the strength which was given to the first Christians at the holy Table, how they came therefrom like lions (St Chrysostom) and—treading the world and its joys underfoot—went more joyfully to martyrdom and to death than others go to a wedding ? . . . Oh ! let us also learn to treasure ever more and more the infinite grace which our divine Lord imparts to us through his holy Sacrament, and may this adorable Sacrament be our only love, the only object of our desire, for in it rests our entire hope. It is our life, our resurrection (John ii 25); strengthened by its power we shall walk through the desert of this life unto the ' mount of God ' (3 Kings xix 8). Let us then have courage—courage, and firm, immovable confidence."

Faith and hope find their completion in charity, in burning love and entire devotedness to God. This science of the saints was well understood by Mother Clare. In the Blessed Sacrament she beholds, she sees, the *love of God*. She says in one of her meditations: " How wonderful is this invention of the love of a God ! The Word, by whom all things were made (John i 3) takes the flesh and the nature of poor man ! But still more wonderfully is the love of our God made manifest to us when we see how the Word-made-flesh, for the love of us poor

sinful mortals, changes bread into his glorious body and wine into his precious Blood. Must not this love be responded to with all our love? O my soul, do thou then ask thyself: 'Why dost thou eat with thy Lord and Master; why dost thou sit so often at his Table?' Canst thou in truth reply: 'For love, because I love, and for love alone!' or must thou perhaps acknowledge: 'I am cold, I still possess very little love, my weak sentiments do not yet deserve the name of love'? Oh! mayest thou at least, my soul, be present at his Table to learn how to love, to love more ardently, to inflame thy love at the very furnace of love in the heart of thy Lord and Master!"

How is God present in this mystery of faith and love? Truly, really, and substantially, but in a manner entirely mysterious, a manner worthy of God, a sacramental manner. He is present in the whole sacred Host and also present in the least part of it. As the human soul penetrates and governs the whole body, lives in every limb and part, and nevertheless has not the shape of the body, because it is a spirit, so is Jesus in the whole sacred Host and also in the smallest part of it without having its shape. That is the great wonder of the sacramental Presence, that the body of Christ, in the manner of a spirit, entirely fills the sacramental species while it retains its natural state, its natural shape.

In the most holy Sacrament our divine Saviour is present just as he is in heaven, enthroned at the right hand of his Father. This thought, that our Lord and Saviour in all his glory, with his wonderful life, is present in this Sacrament, was most familiar to Mother Clare. We will quote only one passage on this subject, but a very beautiful one. "Not only throughout the day, when worshippers are to be found before him, but throughout the night also he remains in the tabernacle keeping guard over his children, blessing their rest and pleading for them with the Father. Oh! how he rejoices when one of his children awakening in the night sends heavenward a sigh

of love; and with what love does he return the greeting . . . When we leave him corporally he nevertheless accompanies us, and never for one instant are we out of his sight, no matter where we may be; he sees us just as he saw Nathanael, to whom he said: 'When thou wast under the fig tree I saw thee' (John i 48). Walls and space are no hindrance to him, that we know. His eyes are brighter than the sun (Ecclus. xxiii 28); and as the light of day accompanies and illumines all our actions, so also from the tabernacle do the eyes and the presence of our divine Lord enlighten and accompany us; for in the most holy Sacrament he is become our constant companion, leading and guiding our every step and action."

Although Christ is present wholly and entirely in the Blessed Sacrament, nevertheless, in accordance with his holy will, we honour there especially his adorable human Heart. In Holy Communion he gives us his precious Blood, the blood of his Sacred Heart; first of all his corporal Heart, but then also his spiritual Heart—his thought for us, his care for us, and most especially his love for us, the love of the Saviour, the redeeming love of the divine Heart. In the most holy Sacrament is present the Heart of the poor Child of Bethlehem, the Heart that was consumed with bitter suffering for us, the Heart of him who in the Garden of Gethsemani, in the very agony of death, sweated blood for us!

"Let us not be ungrateful, but let us endeavour to impress deeply upon our heart all that our Saviour has done for us. Let us not forget the bloody sweat that he shed for us, but let us receive it into our soul. One drop of this sweat which was wrung in agony from his Sacred Heart can change sinners into saints. And does not our Lord in Holy Communion give us all his sweat, that sweat of blood? Oh! let us be faithful to him; let us not move one single step away from him, in order that we may understand his love better, and never, never be unmindful of his gifts."

Present in the Blessed Sacrament is that heart which was broken for us on the Cross. Forsaken even by his heavenly Father, he endured for us this most fearful desolation, this mysterious agony. In this also we must take part.

"When we have received our divine Lord in the Blessed Sacrament we can with truth say that we abide in him and he in us (John xv 4). Must we not then prove our fidelity to him? And if he should send to us but one drop from his own awful cup of desolation, shall we not accept it? No matter how greatly he may try us, our desolation will never reach the agony of desolation, that he endured for us. And although we seem forsaken, he withdraws from us neither his grace nor his help. Love may, indeed, mourn and complain with the psalmist: 'Lord, why castest thou off my prayer? Why turnest thou away thy face from me?' (Ps. lxxxvii 15), but true love is never discouraged."

There on the Altar is the Heart that even after death was cruelly pierced by the lance; and out of this "greatest and deepest of his wounds" streamed forth his most precious Blood even to the last drop. "It is the great wound of love that was caused more by the fire of his love than by the lance." "The sacred chalice before which we prostrate in adoration, contains all this precious Blood even to the last drop."

For Mother Clare the Blessed Sacrament and the Sacred Heart were one and the same, as they were for St Margaret Mary Alacoque and the Servant of God Sister Mary of the Divine Heart; and the month of the Sacred Heart was a time of special devotion for the revered Foundress. The demands of the Sacred Heart devotion, namely, *love* and *atonement*, were, as we have already seen, part of her life—grateful, reciprocal love and reparation for the dishonour, the want of love, the unkindness, the slights shown by us and by others towards the Sacred Heart hidden in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar.

" Endeavour earnestly to offer to the Eternal Father, daily and hourly, the sufferings of your Lord for your own sins and for the sins of the world."

How can we prove our love better than by making atonement, by taking up our dwelling once and for all in the chapel, in the tabernacle, in the sacred Host; yes, even in the most holy and divine Heart of the Saviour hidden in the Blessed Sacrament ?

That was Mother Clare's resting-place, which she shows so distinctly in her tenderly devout meditation on the words of the Canticle of Canticles (ii 14). " My dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hollow places of the wall." In " the wounds of Jesus the Crucified, especially the wound of his Heart " she dwelt at all times, and taught others to dwell there also.

This then is presupposed for those who desire to take up the " Practice " of Mother Clare Fey: lively faith, tender confidence, firm hope; and above all, ardent, burning love.

VI

THE " PRACTICE " PROPER

We desire by means of the " Practice " to remain united with our divine Lord in the Blessed Sacrament the whole day long; always, if we may thus express it, being in the humour for Holy Communion. It follows, therefore, that an essential preliminary of the " Practice " consists in a good Communion, in the preservation of the eucharistic grace from one Holy Communion to another.

We all have the will to communicate not only worthily, but as well as lies in our power; and herein each one can and must make progress. Every sacramental meditation of Mother Clare is an exhortation to this. How entirely is she penetrated with the words: " Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed " (Matt. viii 8).

Each single Communion ought to be a real event in our life; this we should impress upon ourselves again and again, especially in this time of grace when we have the great privilege of approaching our divine Lord daily. And just because we approach the " Table of the Lord " day by day we ought to endeavour with all our strength to make every Communion something new to us. Never may there be even a trace of lukewarmness or indifference ! " Let us not remain blind and cold in presence of this divine Wonder !" No, we must hunger for this Bread of Life even as the five thousand in the desert hungered for earthly bread.

The Danish convert Jörgensen, in his *Pilgrim's Book*, tells us how he visited the mountains of Alverna where St Francis received the stigmata, and how when he came to the place where our divine Saviour appeared to Brother

John of Alverna, the cry escaped him: "Surely, the ground upon which such a meeting took place (a meeting between a man and his God!) is worth being enclosed as holy ground!" Does not his exclamation give us food for thought? Which is the greater, a vision of our God or that we receive our God into our heart? Which is the greater, that God stands before me and I before him, or that he is in me and I in him?

This was a thought so familiar to the revered Foundress that we may call it a favourite thought of her ardent soul. In the meditation on the invocation, "Memorial of the wonders of God" she says: "We have all that they had who on earth lived so close to the Son of God. The words recorded by St Luke apply to us as to them: 'Blessed are the eyes that see the things which you see' (x 23). O memorial of the wonders of God's love! take our cold hearts prisoner, draw them with force to thyself, for a heart is not worthy to beat that does not beat for thee alone! O Mary, our Mother, who will excuse us at the Day of Judgement for our negligence and lukewarmness towards this wondrous Sacrament? Do thou intercede for us now, do thou convert us, inflame us, that at last we may begin to return thy divine Son love for love!" The meditations of the venerated Mother on the life of the Redeemer frequently close with an application to the Blessed Sacrament. We will take a single example from among many: "As the divine Redeemer sat at Jacob's well awaiting the Samaritan woman, so also does he wait now for us in his most holy Sacrament, at that wondrous source of grace!" Can we not with truth say: "The Master is here and calleth for thee"? (John xi 28).

The ground on which the same divine Master appeared to Brother John of Alverna has been enclosed, so that it may not be desecrated by the traces of human feet. A few favoured ones alone have found entrance to the holy place, and that on their knees; for has not God stood here? When we consider this, does not the question

rise in our mind: " What of our Communion rail ?" et us listen to Mother Clare: " As often as we receive Holy Communion we meet Jesus on our path through life," the same Jesus who met Martha and Brother John of Alverna. " He speaks with us, he comforts us, he instructs us. When we speak thus familiarly with him, his holy will is often made known to us, and sometimes he charges us with this or that business, or he impresses upon us the fulfilment of the duties of our vocation."

Mother Clare says further: " There are three places especially holy, three places in which the glory of God dwells; the first is heaven; the second, not less holy, not less the dwelling of God and of the Lamb, is our churches; the third is the Christian soul into which Jesus enters through frequent Communion. . . . ' Verily, this place is holy and I knew it not ' " (Gen. xxviii 16).

How ought we to communicate ? (*a*) With recollection. Already on the evening before, when the day's work is done, we ought to begin to recollect ourselves and strive to think of God alone, for this time should be kept free for the divine Redeemer. " My God and my All !" That is the *one* thing necessary ! " The Bridegroom comes !" " Will not the soul consecrated to God forget everything else and hasten to meet him with delight ?" Already " he stands at the door and knocks " (Apoc. iii 20). " My Jesus, my Spouse ! My God and my all !"

The daily life of the Christian, also of those who have the happiness of living in the convent, consists in prayer and work. Contemplation and activity go together. " Mary and Martha must be united in us." But before Holy Communion we represent Mary only, kneeling at the feet of the loving Saviour who meekly blames the activity of Martha now. To Mary belongs " the best part,"—viz. Christ himself, the Son of the living God !

How can we learn the practice of this recollection before Holy Communion ? St Francis de Sales, who lived in constant and loving intercourse with his Lord and God,

was once asked by his friend the Bishop Camus of Belley, how one could learn to love God. The saint replied: "By loving him!" On the question being repeated several times, he gave each time the same answer, and then added the explanation: "One can obtain a virtue by making acts of the virtue, individual actions. He who frequently humbles himself inwardly and outwardly will, in time, become humble." How then can one become recollected? One must think of Jesus in his most holy Sacrament, and only of him. If other thoughts rise in the mind one must quietly put them aside; Jesus must be our one thought, Jesus, and always Jesus! "What have I in heaven, and besides thee what do I desire upon earth? Thou art the God of my heart and the God that is my portion for ever" (Ps. lxxii 25-26). "God made the human heart for himself and it cannot rest till it finds rest in him" (St Augustine i 1).

"When a soul grasps this truth, she begins to long with great desire for the possession of her God; and as it is not yet given to her to fully enjoy God's presence in heaven, it is the Blessed Sacrament alone that makes her sojourn on earth endurable to her. There she finds her Beloved, although hidden; there she remains at his feet and opens her entire heart before him, there alone she finds consolation and the place of her rest on earth (Ps. cxxxi 14). Her heaven on earth is Jesus in the most holy Sacrament." "When a soul begins to get a glimpse of the Beloved, if only through a cleft in the wall behind which he hides himself (Cant. ii 9), she turns her back upon all else, upon all that could detain her from drawing near to him. Happy, indeed, is such a soul! She will not go away empty, for the Lord fills the hungry with good things (Luke i 53); therefore her desire, her longing will truly be fulfilled."

The mystery of recollection before Holy Communion is very simple. Mother Clare explains it to us in two words: "Love and longing!" In the evening our soul

should be filled with longing desire for him who is coming on the morrow, and on waking in the morning our first thought should be: " He is coming ! Only a little while, my soul, and he will be with us !"

It may be that we have necessary work to do before Holy Communion, work that cannot be postponed, and it may be that this is the case each day. But even then we must be recollected, entirely recollected. Do not let us say: " It cannot be done; it is not practicable !" It can be done quite well. It may be difficult in the beginning; but every lesson has to be learnt ! And everyone who has desired to learn this important lesson has learnt that in spite of exterior occupation it is quite possible to think of Jesus and at the same time perform our appointed work well. We also shall learn this, and then be doubly pleasing to our divine Lord; first, by performing the work of our vocation, and secondly, by thinking faithfully of the divine Master. " The one eye must be occupied in the service of thy neighbour, but the other thou shouldst keep immovably fixed on thy Spouse."* (Meditation on " Walking in the Presence of God.")

During sleepless nights let us not think of our work and cares, but rather of him who " passed the whole night in the prayer of God " (Luke vi 12); let us think of the night in which he was betrayed, when he took bread and broke it and said: " Take ye and eat: this is my body " (1 Cor. xi 23-34).

* The Dutch Translator rightly remarks here that Mother Clare in these words describes the highest perfection attainable, the ideal that gained life in herself. For us, especially for beginners, the all-important point is to resolve with determination to begin again and again. It will often be forgotten, but that does not matter; it is not a question of duty, no sin will be committed by the forgetting. Only begin anew, quietly and without anxiety. Mother Clare herself did not attain her ideal in a day ! It took her much time. The little point which the said Translator adds is also very true—the first duty at night is to sleep, and not to pray.

And if we can still find no rest, no sleep, then not only the body but the soul also should keep watch with the divine Saviour; for these hours of stillness and silence belong entirely to him. In this let us be faithful, and this fidelity is sure to bring great blessings. But even if it brought no blessing at all we should observe it, nevertheless, for is it not fitting that there should be a time which belongs to our divine Lord alone? And during this time does he not also belong entirely to us? " Behold he shall neither slumber nor sleep, that keepeth Israel " (Ps. cxx 4). While we are distant from him, while we sleep, his Heart thinks of us, cares for us, protects us, loves us. Yes, he loves us unceasingly, he thinks of us uninterruptedly. Then let us return this love; let us think of him and love him. More than this he does not ask of us, for his one desire is to be loved. Love and remembrance, these two are one. A tranquil soul who quietly but perseveringly rejects every other thought, is a pure resting-place for the All-pure, for the Eternal Purity. " I seek a pure heart and there is the place of my rest " (*Imitation* iv, 12). " No matter how poor, how full of infirmities a heart may be, if only its chief affection is fixed on God, and it can say with truth to the divine Master: ' Lord, I love thee with my whole entire heart,' the all-loving Master will gladly rest and dwell therein."

(*b*) Before Holy Communion there must be longing, ardent desire, real yearning for Jesus, for his strengthening presence. This is an important act of preparation. Our divine Saviour said at the Last Supper: *Desiderio desideravi*, " With desire I have desired to eat this pasch with you " (Luke xxii 15). " My delights are to be with the children of men " (Prov. viii 31). If he thus longs for us, surely we must long for him. " O Lord my God, who lovest us even to excess, whose delight it is to be with the poor children of Eve, let it be our greatest delight from henceforth to be with thee, O Infinite Good!" Let us unite our longing desire with that of the saints of the

Old Law, and with the saints of the New Law who communicated with such ardent devotion. " He that thirsteth, let him come " (Apoc. xxii 17).

How impressively, how ardently does Mother Clare speak of this desire in her meditation on *The Viaticum of St Stanislaus Kostka*, on November 13, 1849.

" In the heart of the youthful Stanislaus the lamp of the tabernacle burnt day and night before the hidden God, and he was ever anxious to keep it burning and to nourish it with the oil of good works, with the flames of constant, ardent love. By the light of this lamp his heart remained pure, his conscience unstained; for how could he have endured the least tarnish on his soul in the presence of the Beloved, to whom he had given himself entirely! Truly, his love and devotion to the God hidden beneath the form of bread, led him unspotted and unstained through the dangerous path of life.

" And how greatly did our divine Lord reward this love, even before the saint left this valley of tears! As he once lay ill in the house of his Lutheran tutor, and the priest could not get to him to bring him holy Viaticum, an angel descended from heaven with the bread of angels to nourish and strengthen the young wanderer.

" Thus does the Lord reward the ardent longing and tender love of a pure soul for the Sacrament of his love. The fault is our own if we do not partake of the wondrous fruits and graces of this most holy Sacrament; for our divine Lord waits till our heart yearns for him before he will give himself entirely to us. Hour by hour, or rather every moment of our life, we can unite ourselves with him if we only *desire* it.

" Why then are we so lukewarm towards this holy Sacrament in which is our salvation? Why do we not, with yearning love, keep our heart constantly turned towards this ' Most Pure Feast ' (*Litany of the Blessed Sacrament*) as the flower holds its chalice open to receive the dew of heaven? Why do we not sigh each moment:

'Come, Lord Jesus, do not forsake me! I desire nothing but thee!'"

Let us unite our poor unworthy longing with the yearning love of the Immaculate Virgin, that yearning which is beyond our understanding, in which was united the yearning desire of all the saints of the Old Law, and which yet surpassed them all in an immeasurable degree. Or shall we go further still and unite our longing for him with his longing for our poor love, for the love of our cold, unworthy hearts!

If our hearts thus truly long for the Redeemer, the holy angels will hasten to us with the greeting: "Behold we bring you tidings of great joy. For unto you is born a Saviour" (Luke ii 10). Yes, he himself will come; he, your salvation! "You shall draw water with joy out of the Saviour's fountains" (Isa. xii 3).

Therefore, let us keep firmly and courageously to the practice of repeating acts of longing love again and again, even in times of the greatest spiritual aridity; then we shall communicate well. "The Lord gives to those who long," says Mother Clare.

(*c*) After Holy Communion we must *adore* the Holy One who is present within us. O sublime thought—God is here! In his presence the whole earth is silent, and silent is my poor soul in which he has taken up his abode. I adore him now in the sanctuary of my heart. I adore him in his holy place. Gratitude unites with adoration, that is natural. Yes, let us *thank* him, thank him as a well trained child thanks for a favour, with childlike simplicity. The time after Holy Communion is especially the time of thanksgiving. This is the first duty. "Bless the Lord, O my soul . . . who healeth all thy diseases" (Ps. cii 2). First then, thanksgiving, deep and tender thanksgiving, and in holy, loving joy speak to the sweet guest of our soul: "What is man that thou art mindful of him? Or the son of man that thou visitest him?" (Ps. viii 5). May the infinite condescension of

our God enkindle our hearts and inflame them ever more and more with the fire of his love! When we approach the holy Table may our heart cry out with ardent desire: "Love, only love! Give love, my God!" We must, of course, make use of the prayer of petition, but not till we have thanked. Let us thank and praise for ourselves; but do not let us forget those poor unhappy ones to whom the words *gratitude* and *thanksgiving* are utterly unknown and thus we shall offer atonement and reparation to the divine Heart of the loving Saviour. "May we indeed make use of the treasure of grace which is placed in our hands through the adorable Sacrifice, the sacrifice of infinite value, the true propitiation for the living and the dead!" What joy should we not thereby give to the loving Guest of our soul!

With regard to *petition* after Holy Communion, do we need exhortation? "Come to me all you that labour and are burdened; and I will refresh you" (Matt. xi 28). "What does a child do when it is hurt or wounded, or if it is threatened with danger? To whom does it run? Is not its first word: 'Mother! Mother!' . . . We know a name that is sweeter even than the name of mother; we know a cry more powerful still than the cry of 'Mother!'

"When we are in grief, and from the depths of our heart we cry out: 'Jesus! Jesus!' has not experience taught us that help is instantly at hand? Therefore nothing shall keep us back; no misery, nor wretchedness, no sickness, not even our sins; on the contrary, these ought to urge us to cling all the more closely to our Lord and Saviour, for he alone can help and defend us. Listen how he calls all to himself, no one is left out: 'Come to me all you that labour and are burdened.'" When examining our conscience at night let us be mindful that the most important point is: "How did I communicate this morning?"

There is another thought that we must keep well in mind—viz., our *abiding* in Jesus, and Jesus, the Sacra-

mental Jesus, abiding in us, the preservation of the grace of Communion. Mother Clare is here the most beautiful model. With that burning zeal with which she embraced everything that could bring her nearer to God, her two chief devotions soon became one, so that her walking in God's presence took its source in Holy Communion and at the same time referred all to this divine Sacrament, just as if the eucharistic Saviour with his Godhead as well as his Manhood was still constantly present with her and as if her whole day's work were one continued thanksgiving for his gracious presence. Mother Clare received Holy Communion not only daily, but, under the direction of her pious confessor, she endeavoured to make her Communion a perpetual one; as Father Sartorius reminds her in her own words on January 28, 1851: "The union constant, the communication with our divine Lord unceasing." How well her endeavours succeeded is shown by the words which the same spiritual director wrote to her at Christmas, 1854: "You must completely despise all your disquietness and continue to communicate not only once a day but every moment—as you once told me yourself."

On October 23, 1846, Mother Clare gives her Sisters points for meditation on the words in St John (xi 30) "For Jesus was not yet come into the town: but he was still in that place where Martha had met him." She says: "We must, in accordance with the divine will, attend to the business and duties of our vocation throughout the day; but it will greatly tend to our consolation if we consider that we can return to our Lord as often as we like: *Jesus is still in the same place* where we *met* him this morning. According to his Godhead he has remained in our heart, in our soul, there we can find him at all times throughout the whole day, at every hour; there, we can speak with him, there seek consolation, counsel, light, and strength, there we can rest when we are weary. Therefore, let us make use of this infinite mercy of our

God; let us often throw ourselves in spirit at his feet, for he is awaiting us *in the place* where he spoke with us in the early morning, in order to be our help in every need."

This will be the last, the most beautiful fruit of this " Practice," " the resting-place of S Mary Magdalen " at the feet of the Lord to whom we firmly cling in " constant, uninterrupted, I could almost say, *obstinate* fidelity."

On April 20, 1851, Mother Clare writes in a general letter for Easter: " S Teresa says: ' If you are faithful in this walking with and before the Lord, you will at last be so united with him that you will not be able to drive him from you !' Oh ! would that the blissful moment were already here ! Let us take care that we do not allow it to pass by unnoticed, but let us pray that it may come soon ! Each Communion can make us holy."

This glorious gift obtained through so much self-denial and abnegation, through such earnest efforts in the service of the " Practice " and through so many ingenious little means of retaining the presence of God, was nothing else than constant, tender intimacy with God, which from this time (about 1858) to the end of her life, Mother Clare possessed in a manner pre-eminently her own. In an exhortation to the Sisters in 1863 she says: " With courage and with confidence we must break through all the miseries and distractions that would separate us from our divine Lord, and not rest till we have found a sure place at his sacred feet where in sweet solitude we may remain alone with him."

VII

SPECIAL APPLICATIONS OF THE " PRACTICE "

1. Spiritual Communion

How shall we retain this place at the feet of our divine Saviour? We shall retain it by means of a number of little individual practices, which taken together constitute the great " Practice," the real " Practice."

The first among these is spiritual Communion. After all that has been said this is perfectly clear and needs no further explanation, notwithstanding the importance of the matter. Mother Clare gives us an example of this. Even as early as 1844 we find among her resolutions the resolve to make a spiritual Communion every hour during one week; and a year or two later (1847) her spiritual director imposed upon her the making of a spiritual Communion every half-hour from New Year's day till the feast of the Epiphany.

A Sister writes: " How greatly the interior recollection and intimate intercourse with God had become as a second nature to our Mother, manifested itself in the time of recreation also. Although she took due part in the conversation, and that in such an unaffected, winning manner as to be a real joy to the Sisters, one could nevertheless remark how several times during every recreation she raised her heart to him whom alone she loved and at all times sought. Unknown to herself—or she would anxiously have endeavoured to avoid it—she turned her head a little to the side and her eyes became still more radiant than usual, taking a most tender speaking expression; but in an instant she was again with those around her, earnest or bright and cheerful, just as the moment demanded of her."

Another Sister says: " When one was very much with her, one could plainly see the loving glance which she cast to the side about every quarter of an hour, as if to appeal tenderly to someone near her." These acts were not simply elevations of the heart, they were spiritual Communions; this is clear to everyone who has learnt to know Mother Clare's spirit from her *Life* and her *Meditations*. But one can also learn from the venerated Mother how to make spiritual Communion, quite short and simply.

Those who are really in earnest regarding the " Practice " must go forward step by step as the revered Mother did. In the beginning, a spiritual Communion every hour; for the first few times it would be good perhaps to make this according to a really good prayer book, in order to obtain a secure basis for this practice. Then according to time and occupation, the renewal will later on become longer or shorter, but in any case one must so arrange that no work of duty may in any way suffer from it. When pressed for time, a single act of longing love for the Saviour in the tabernacle who has rested in our heart this morning is sufficient, and such an act requires but a second of time. Mother Clare says herself: " A soul consecrated to God must be ready at all times to receive Holy Communion." They who begin as Mother Clare began and who are faithful in the " Practice " will attain this most desirable end: " Always and at all times to be ready !" Begin slowly and quietly, and persevere firmly and steadily in what has been begun !

2. Prayer

Another means of retaining a sure place at the sacred feet of the Redeemer are our *exercises of prayer*. " Our whole life . . . prayer !" are words quite natural on the lips of that chosen soul whose life was a continued spiritual Communion. She knew how to place every exercise

of prayer and every single prayer in the service of the "Practice." "Only let us think," she says, "how often we pronounce the sacred name of Jesus in one single rosary! Oh! truly, if we had always called upon this adorable name with devotion we should have had the entire world and hell itself beneath our feet long ago!" They who have grasped the meaning of this single sentence and have understood what true devotion meant with Mother Clare, will begin to make their whole life prayer, their whole life a spiritual Communion.

Mother Clare says further: "Let us to-day make the firm resolution never to pronounce the adorable name of Jesus without devotion, inward and outward reverence, and in a year's time we shall see what unspeakable profit our soul has reaped from it." This thought which Mother Clare put before her daughters on January 1, 1847, she considered sufficiently important to be enlarged upon a year later, when she says: "To-day we will make a really firm resolution never to pronounce this sweet and blessed name in vain, particularly at prayer; and when we pronounce this name in the Ave Maria, or elsewhere, we will not only bow our head but our heart and soul also in humility and exultation before it. Let us try this, let us urge ourselves to it, and the unction and strength of this name will penetrate our every prayer, and we shall not complain so much about distractions and temptations during our prayer."

Mother Clare knew how to refer all prayer to the God hidden on the Altar. On August 19, 1849, she writes to her director: "I have exhorted the Sisters always to refer Office, etc., to the Blessed Sacrament and to offer the psalms of praise as thanksgiving for the last Communion. I told them that the *Magnificat* was the Communion prayer of our Blessed Lady, which her enraptured soul poured forth after the Incarnation of the divine Word." In fourteen meditations she gave the Sisters very beautiful thoughts on this "wonderful

canticle of the most humble Virgin in praise of the Most High."

How much could we not say here of the life of prayer of the venerated Mother, which kept her in constant union with Jesus! How often a single verse of Scripture was sufficient for a meditation, simple and unpretentious, yet full of deep thoughts! She knew how to refer all to the divine Saviour, to him who for love of us remains hidden in the Blessed Sacrament.

3. Recollection

With the aforesaid, the foundation has been given for that which is at one and the same time the "Practice" and the fruit of the "Practice," viz., continual *recollection*. The life of the venerated Mother shows here a wonderful progress until it reaches the unchanging and unchangeable rest of the soul in the Sacramental Saviour, that repose which is a reflection of the eternal sabbath rest of heaven. Is it not a beautiful coincidence that the four volumes of her meditations, printed for the use of the Congregation alone, close with this "rest"? "Oh! would that our divine Lord would take permanent possession of our heart, would that we could exclude everything from it which is not his, and for him! What peace, what rest would then be our portion! Neither joy nor sorrow would be able to rob us of our peace; our feet would be already standing in the courts of the Lord, in the courts of the heavenly Jerusalem, the land of eternal rest" (Ps. cxxi 2).

How often does she emphasise that other thought: "Jesus alone!" "O my Jesus, thou art sufficient for me! If I have thee I have everything! Apart from thee there is nothing I could wish for! . . . Oh! would that at last we could seek our Lord alone, not his consolations, not his graces, but himself, himself alone, the source of all grace, of all sweetness! . . . Remain with

us, Lord, do not leave us a single day, a single moment, without thee!" These are words which the revered Mother uses in the explanation of the Litany of the Blessed Sacrament.

How often do we find with Mother Clare the one beautiful thought in new phrasing! Love knows but one song: longing for the Beloved! She sees Magdalen at the feet of the Crucified and says: "Would that we also could attain to this degree of love, where we know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified (i Cor. ii 2), where we renounce ourselves and are mindful only of honouring him, loving him and glorifying him, where he is our only thought and the whole striving of our heart." When gazing on the happiness of the family at Bethania, the spouse of Christ is filled with longing and sighs to her Beloved: "Come, Lord, come! Come, Eternal Love, Unending Mercy! Come, we long for thee! Come, and be thou our consolation, our help, our companion, our one and only love!" But hers is not a love consisting of words and feeling only; no, her love consists of deeds! "She who desires to serve the Lord must serve him perfectly and with her whole heart, not the smallest fibre may be kept back." "From this day forward may we know no other love, no other thought but this most holy Sacrament!"

Thus the recollection, the sacramental recollection of the revered Mother signifies finally the highest Christian perfection; but to this perfection one can only attain gradually. The chief means have already been named—viz., spiritual Communion and prayer. Mother Clare offers a number of suggestions which give proof of her great experience in the spiritual life. She is well acquainted with the "little means of renewing the remembrance of the divine Presence" (*Letter of November* 23, 1849). The stroke of the clock, the bell from the church tower, yes, even the ringing of the door bell is for her a call to remind her of the Beloved. Twenty-three years later

she again refers to the sound of the bell and the stroke of the clock, a proof of her fidelity in making use of this sign during those years. She continues: "Let us seek for such signs as remind us of our Lord; and when we discover that we have been neglectful, let us with renewed courage begin again and again; then at last, as St Teresa says, we shall find our Lord and God so near to us, so constantly with us that we shall not be able to withdraw ourselves from his Presence."

Mother Clare, as we have already said, knew how to place everything in the service of her "Practice." She says: "She whose heart has been stolen by the divine Babe, and who has willingly delivered it up to him as the best gift she possesses, does everything for the Lord, refers everything to him. She begins to forget herself and the thought of God becomes predominant. If she feels the roughness of the wind, or if the cold is trying to her, she thinks: 'The divine Babe in the Crib suffered still greater cold!' If the heat of the sun overpowers her, she reflects: 'This same sun which shines on me, shone also on my Saviour and forced the perspiration from his sacred body!' If she sees the moon or the stars she says to herself: 'This moon, these self-same stars were witnesses of many a night-watch of my Lord, witnesses of his fearful agony on Mount Olivet!' If she reads, or hears, anything edifying she reflects: 'Our divine Lord says that to me!' And if she sees a flower or fruit she says: 'My Lord created this for me!' Even with every piece of bread she eats, she acknowledges: 'This is a gift from my Lord, without whose benefits I could not exist even for one moment, from whose love alone I live.' If we earnestly strive to live in this manner* our entire heart

* The Dutch Translator draws our attention to the fact that the highest perfection is taught here. But, nevertheless, we are not forbidden to strive after this. It must, however, be done quietly, without restlessness of the soul and without harm to the body. If it is not attained, or only slowly and very

will soon belong to the divine Child, and that is the only thing his love desires of us. Does he not say: ' My son, give me thy heart ' ?" (Ps. xxiii 26).

" The house of Nazareth, so little and so hidden, was indeed a paradise, a very heaven on earth. If we were privileged to look into it, what holiness, what recollection we should see there in the most commonplace occupation of life ! How we should learn to pray and to work, how clearly we should understand that even eating, drinking, and sleeping can become sanctified and pleasing to God ! Let us beg our divine Saviour to grant us but one glance into this mysterious life, and then let us ask ourselves at every occupation: ' How would my Redeemer, or Mary and Joseph, have acted in my place ?' and let us endeavour to follow their example."

How simply all this reads ! And yet this teaching is true perfection, the highest wisdom in simple, unpretentious clothing. Mother Clare is here like those saints who allowed everything to remind them of their Love, and who referred everything to him. She is particularly like Blessed Crescentia of Kaufbeuren, who likewise at her daily work saw the Redeemer in all things. Her words, also, are like those of the Blessed One, when in an exhortation of true wisdom she urges her Sisters to strive to acquire the " Practice " and especially recollection of spirit, with *meekness* and *gentleness*, gradually and quietly, but at the same time with perseverance and firmness.

That which has already been said regarding her progress in the practice of spiritual Communion, clearly indicates how deeply this principle was established in the revered Mother of avoiding anything like force in her endeavour to attain to the " Practice." In her instructions on " Walking in the presence of God " she expressly

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gradually, we must still remain quiet and work on with courage and perseverance. The Translator very rightly reminds us that the good intention frequently renewed makes all our actions, even the most insignificant, pleasing to God.

excludes *constraint* and *disquiet ;* and this is a very important remark especially for inexperienced and over zealous beginners, as also for the weakly and nervous, and indeed, for all ! It is only in quiet hearts that God can carry his work into effect. A place of refuge, a place of rest is what we are seeking, and this must be sought in peace and quietness.

When from time to time the highest ideal is put before us in this instruction, it is only the *end* and *aim* that is shown to us. Those who desire to attain to this must not begin with the highest, but must proceed quietly and perseveringly, seeking instruction when doubts arise. First a little is undertaken, then gradually more—but not too much, especially in the beginning. By means of quiet perseverance—and perseverance is always quiet, never hasty or impetuous—one will attain a great facility in making new applications of the " Practice," or rather will be led by God to new applications. One must never forget that the chief thing is fidelity, " obstinate " fidelity and quiet perseverance; always beginning again, every morning and every noon.

The first exercise will be spiritual Communion—every hour, perhaps—then gradually the other applications of the " Practice " will follow and the number of spiritual Communions will increase of itself. Almost without knowing it, we shall learn to think only of Jesus. " Think thou of me and I will think of thee," our divine Lord said to S Catherine of Siena. By means of quiet, constant recollection we shall attain to the same beautiful end. " Who would not willingly think of the most lovable, the most beautiful of all the sons of men ? (Ps. xliv 3). Who would not willingly bring him before their minds, not only every hour but unceasingly, uninterruptedly ?"

They who desire to attain to this treasured end must work according to the measure of their powers, without constraint, without force, prudently and quietly. " The Lord is not in the storm wind, not in the earthquake "

(3 Kings xix 11), not in confusion and disorder; when he enters a heart he says at all times, " Peace be with this house " (Matt x 12). In peace then we will make of our heart a tent for the Prince of Peace.

But we must not be alarmed if, in spite of good resolutions, we do not reach our desired aim; if again and again we find that we have so often and so long forgotten the spiritual Communion and recollection. The great thing is always to begin again and not to grow uneasy. It is not a question of duty but a voluntary exercise of love; and the more quietly and calmly we undertake it, the more surely shall we attain to our beautiful end and object. Let us not forget that Mother Clare herself did not find the happy resting-place at the feet of the Redeemer, until after many years of faithful striving. Therefore, let us never grow weary of beginning again !

Work

At work to keep Jesus always before our mind ! In the preceding point we saw how recollection sanctifies work; now we will fix our attention expressly on work itself, which obtains its value solely through Jesus. How simply and beautifully does Mother Clare teach this in her deep meditation on the first garment which the most holy Virgin wove for the divine Child ! She says there: " If our faith were truly lively, with what consolation, with what devotion, should we not perform our work ! A Sister is occupied in the kitchen; can we not in truth say to her: ' Rejoice, for indeed you are preparing food for your Lord !' Another Sister is sewing or knitting, and to her we can likewise say: ' Be careful, be diligent, let your heart overflow with love and with every stitch offer it to the Lord, for you are weaving a little garment for the poor Child Jesus !' Again, a Sister is instructing the little ones, and we feel urged to cry out to her: ' O Sister, do you not see how the divine Child looks at you and repeats

after you the words and prayers you say to him?' Oh! truly, our loving Saviour accepts everything we do as if it were done to him, if only we keep the eyes of faith fixed upon him.

"Let us accustom ourselves by means of these or similar thoughts to 'sanctify' the work of our vocation and we shall undoubtedly perform it well, for who would dare to be careless when working for the Lord Jesus? If our intention is pure, our work is not only work but prayer, delicious perfume, sweet smelling incense ascending to the Throne of the Most High! And what is prayer but the raising of the mind and heart to God? Nothing is so pleasing to God as when we keep our mind and heart fixed on him; nothing brings us so near to him as humble, constant prayer, the prayer of faith. Did not our divine Lord himself tell us that we must pray at all times, pray without ceasing? This incense of prayer is what the All-Holy desires to see at all times ascending before his heavenly Throne. . . .

"The best and most sure means of obtaining the gift of prayer is when we endeavour so to dispose our heart that it fulfils the will of God at every moment, whether by work or rest, by waking or sleeping, by eating and drinking. She whose constant disposition it is to desire and to do at all times what God requires of her, and who by frequent acts of love, or even by one glance towards heaven, keeps her heart and soul united with God, such a one prays, prays unceasingly; and when the appointed hour of prayer comes she does not need much time to recollect herself, for she is already recollected in him who is never absent from her mind, recollected as St Aloysius was to whom it was one and the same thing to kneel down and to be entirely lost in God."

Thus did the revered Mother herself pray. On August 4, 1850, she writes to a Sister: "You see, therefore, how very busy we are. But that does not hinder intercourse with our divine Lord or even the most intimate

union with him *if we are only faithful.*" A beautiful little incident is related in her *Life*. A Sister once saw how she entered the choir with a letter in her hand and kneeling before the Altar pleaded to the divine Counsellor in the tabernacle: " Only one word, Lord !" and then after a devout Our Father left the choir to fulfil, no doubt, the counsel which the divine Master had given to her. Does not that again remind us of Blessed Crescentia, whose work often obliged her to go before the Blessed Sacrament but did not allow her to remain ? She then said simply: " My God, for love of thee and in obedience !"

Mother Clare owed that wonderful calm which she preserved in the midst of business of all kinds, to the constant walking in God's presence; and she earnestly warns her Sisters against the contrary. Hurry and haste were indeed unknown to her; they were for her as for St Francis de Sales, " a pest of holy devotion." A Sister writes of her: " She did that which each day and each hour brought with it—not slowly, but calmly and in peace; and she did it thoroughly and completely, as if she had nothing else to do or to care for."

Here again we see the experienced teacher of the spirit, and here again we see how the " Practice " is the best weapon against over haste, this fault of " rushing," against which Mother Clare so often admonishes her daughters.

Interior Trials

But the exterior work is not the worst, whether it be corporal or mental. That which can become really disquieting, really difficult, is the *interior work*, the work of the interior life. There are times when the soul is depressed and disconsolate, when dark sombre clouds gather around her and life becomes almost intolerable in its monotony and dreariness; but it is just at such times that we must endure manfully and be faithful, truly faithful, in persevering in the " Practice."

This Mother Clare teaches us in a meditation on the desolation of spirit which the blessed Mother of God endured on the loss of the boy Jesus. She says: " Our divine Lord finds pleasure in the tender lamentations of a soul that seeks him. By this longing desire, by this seeking after him, the only Beloved, love is immeasurably increased in the soul. Therefore he often hides himself, that the loving soul may feel in her loneliness how unable she is to live without him."

The revered Mother often returns to such thoughts; as, for instance, in a beautiful and consoling meditation on the sleeping Babe of Bethlehem, when she says: " Most people do not understand this Babe when he sleeps; they think he no longer concerns himself about them, and they go from him and seek other consolation. But they act very wrongly by doing so. It can happen that our Lord sleeps in a soul, that he withdraws his inspirations, his comfort, and acts as if he knows nothing of the soul, that he does not trouble himself about it. But then the soul must persevere faithfully and not turn away her gaze from the sleeping Babe. Is it not sufficient for her that she is allowed to remain with him, even if he does not look at her or speak with her ? Nevertheless, if her fear becomes greater than she can withstand, if storm and tempest surround her, she may indeed be permitted to waken the slumbering Babe, to cry out: ' Jesus, help ! Jesus, I perish !' And the divine Babe with one look of his eyes will banish all terror and fill the poor timid soul with his consolation by scattering all the mists and fogs that surround her. But at the same time she must be prepared to hear the reproach that he will make to her: ' Oh ! thou of little faith, why hast thou doubted ? Didst thou not know that my heart watches over thee even when I sleep ?'

" Let us then take courage; let us wait faithfully for the Lord, no matter whether he comforts us or leaves us without consolation; whether he looks upon us or closes his eyes as if he did not wish to see us; it suffices for us

that we are allowed to remain near him, that we are permitted to look upon his adorable little face; for when he sleeps he is still indescribably lovely and infinitely lovable."

And how earnestly the revered Mother refers to the mystery of the desolation of the divine Heart of Jesus! She says: "We are united with our divine Lord when we have received him in Holy Communion; must we not therefore give him proof of our fidelity? Let us learn then to suffer desolation of spirit for his sake, that is necessary. . . . Let us guard against all interior doubts and confusion. Love complains, it is true, but love is never disheartened. *One* thing we must ever remember, viz., God will never permit us to be tempted beyond our strength (1 Cor. x 13). Let us not look upon everything as lost when we feel that our heart is wanting in good will, when we are not capable of a single good thought, or when we are besieged, as it were, by idle thoughts. Let us do our duty faithfully and simply, even when all joy of spirit has departed from us. And if we cannot do this of ourselves, let us cry to the all-merciful Saviour: 'O Jesus, have pity on me!'

"Let us show our divine Lord that for his sake we can and will suffer desolation of spirit also; for has he not loved us with such an unutterable love as to endure an infinite desolation on the Cross for us, a desolation which forced him to cry out in anguish: 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?'—Let us have confidence! We have seen Eternal Love hanging on the Cross; shall we then dare to complain if the loving Saviour hides himself? Have we not deserved more than that? Have we not deserved to be separated from him throughout all eternity? In times of inward desolation let us say to our divine Lord with faithful heart: 'I seek thee alone, my God; and even if thou hast withdrawn from me, I will still seek nothing but thee!' Let us be assured, the loving Redeemer will return to us; for when he tries us it is only for our sanctification. Days may come when the

work of our vocation weighs upon us like a mountain; but is not this the very best time for a loving soul, when at every step she can say to her Beloved: 'I do this for thee, O Jesus; I could not do it for anyone else!' Therefore, let us be courageous; let us learn to carry the cross for the love of our Lord; we can at least always cry to him: 'Heart of Jesus, forsaken by the Father, have mercy on us!'"

With real enthusiasm Mother Clare enters fully into those words of St Paul "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (Rom. viii 35). She says: "Nothing shall separate us; neither our enemies, for he is mightier than all enemies, he has fettered the Evil One, he has overcome the world, he has crucified the flesh in us; neither our friends, for he is more lovable and more loving than any friend—all the kindness and benevolence of our friends come from him; it is he who loves us in them, who bestows benefits upon us through them. Nothing shall separate us; neither life, for he is our life, nor death, for death is our gain (Phil. i 21), neither distress, danger nor temptation, for in them we cling all the more firmly to him; not even our sins shall separate us, for with them we take refuge in his wounds. . . . What, therefore, shall separate us from the love of Christ? Things of the present? He is with us and protects us beneath his wings (Ps. xvi 8). Or things of the future? The future is in his hand and he ordains it according to his good pleasure. . . . What then shall separate us? Nothing, nothing shall separate us, everything shall serve to bring us closer to him, to be united to Jesus, our Lord."

Temptations can come upon us, even grave temptations. What will they attain? How fittingly does Father Sartorius write on this point to Mother Clare: "The constant exertion of keeping our divine Lord before one's mind weakens every temptation and makes it easy to overcome, for it cannot enter deeply into the soul." Here, without doubt, we see one of the greatest blessings of the "Practice." And should the temptation still

remain on the surface of the soul, should it even become annoying, then "go and take him into the little barque of your soul at whose word storm and wind become still" (Matt. viii 23). Thus Mother Clare teaches us in one of the sacramental meditations. These times of trial are real true times of grace, when the soul makes more progress and loves Jesus more in a single hour than in whole weeks together.

This applies also to the little, almost unnoticed trials. Some sorrowful news comes unexpectedly upon us, or some little vexing occurrence, or a disappointment in our expectation. The golden rule is this: never to allow ourselves to be taken by surprise, no matter what happens. We are always with Jesus; everything is at once thought over with him. This is of great importance; for the little occurrences, the unexpected things, happen more frequently in life, and often give us occasion of proving our fidelity.

Further, an exceedingly great hindrance to recollection in God, in the sacramental Saviour, is recollection in ourselves! How many good souls striving after perfection let themselves be fatally hemmed in by it! The revered Mother saw this clearly. On October 3, 1880, she said to her Sisters: "One of the greatest hindrances for the spiritual life is the being constantly occupied with one's self, always thinking about one's self, always wishing to know the exact state of one's soul. This renders progress impossible. If we would only give up the incessant examining of ourselves, we should surely not walk through the day, so to speak, as though we expected to find a pitfall at every step!" It is very clear that the "Practice," the recollection in the sacramental Saviour, is the radical cure for this world-wide sickness of the spiritual life.

When Bishop (later Cardinal) Mermillod was on a visit to Aix-la-Chapelle he, in conversation with Mother Clare, touched upon the same point, and afterwards the revered Mother made use of his words in a conference on

May 31, 1867, when she said: " A few days ago the Bishop of Geneva was here and spoke words of profound meaning to me about interior things. Among others he said: ' I often think that in the spiritual life it is not so much our real misery that keeps us back as the habit we have got of constantly occupying ourselves with this misery. This is in truth our greatest hindrance.' Let us all endeavour to take these words to heart, dear Sisters, for they are words of great import."

Already on June 12, 1852, Mother Clare had said on this point: " That everlasting brooding over ourselves is a fault. Many a good soul who is really intent on serving our Lord well is infected with it, and this habit is the reason that she makes so little progress towards perfection. Her faults often worry her to despair, and even if one takes the greatest pains to quieten her it is all in vain; for as long as she keeps her faults constantly before her eyes, one can do nothing with her."

Mother Clare's own life, her own spiritual development, shows how one can conquer this fault. The " Practice " was her guide and led her rightly, helping her to overcome all unquietness and anxiety. She had her own special and excellent remedy. How she understood this remedy and how she applied it is shown to us in her impressive meditation on *The Staff of St Gertrude*, with the Prelude: " Who is this that cometh up from the desert, flowing with delights, leaning upon her Beloved ?" (Cant. viii 5).

" We see the great abbess St Gertrude represented with the staff in her hand; but we will turn our gaze from this staff and fix the eyes of our mind on the divine Staff on which the saint leaned for support every day of her life. St Gertrude was so distinguished by this fidelity in supporting herself on the divine Bridegroom that these words find in her their fullest application: ' Who is she that cometh up from the desert, flowing with delights, leaning upon her Beloved ?'

"Peace and joy were ever on the face of this faithful bride, for she rested on the Heart of the divine Bridegroom and was supported by his strong arm. In joy she leaned upon the most beautiful above the sons of men; in sorrow she supported herself upon the Crucified. If she was in consolation she rejoiced in God, her Saviour; if her soul was 'as land where no water is' (Ps. lxii), she turned to the Heart of her Spouse and found in him superabundant compensation for all that was wanting in herself. In health she worked for the Beloved and for him alone; in sickness she willingly kept her couch of pain in his Presence. In the duties of her vocation she obtained counsel and strength from the Bridegroom who never left her side; in the recreation she rejoiced before the Lord as a happy child that plays in the sight of a loving father. She never went to table without inviting her Friend, and her soul was fed by him while her body took food. When she retired to rest she knew that her Beloved guarded her sleep, and her first thought on awakening was a greeting to the Friend of her heart. This constant, trustful leaning on the Beloved was the fundamental characteristic of St Gertrude; and we see how pleasing it was to our divine Lord by the testimony which he himself gave, that he loved to dwell in the heart of his daughter Gertrude. And when this pure spouse drew near to death, the Beloved kissed away her soul and she entered with him into the full joy of the Lord.

"If we compare our life with the life of this great saint we shall find that this loving confidence is sadly wanting in us. And yet there is nothing which pleases our Lord so much as when a soul supports herself wholly and entirely on him. Let us then, once and for all, cast aside all vain self-trust and in all our weakness let us support ourselves upon the Lord, and great peace and rest will be our portion."

This staff of St Gertrude is Christ. And the reason why the revered Mother understood so well how to

initiate us into the secret of the prophetess of the Sacred Heart, was because Christ was *her* Staff also; her staff, her support in consolation and in dryness of spirit, in health and in sickness, in the business belonging to her vocation and in the recreation appointed by her Rule. Like St Gertrude she, too, dwelt at all times in the Heart of the sacramental Saviour.

Intercourse with Others

To see Jesus in our neighbour! This is a very important application of the "Practice." Here on earth we do not see Jesus in his divine glory; but he meets us at all times in disguise, as it were. There is a twofold disguise under which he hides himself; viz. in the Blessed Sacrament where he is present personally, but hidden beneath the sacramental species, and in our neighbour, his representative. Here he is likewise hidden, but nevertheless he desires us to see and acknowledge him in each of our fellow-men without any exception whatever, and especially in those for whom and among whom we work.

Mother Clare was thoroughly penetrated with this thought. Again and again we meet it in her "Meditations," applied in ever new ways. For example, in a meditation on St Martha we find the following: "And they made him a supper there, and Martha served" (John xii 2). "Are we not urged by the desire to serve our divine Lord as Martha served him? Oh! who would not wish for so great a privilege; what heart would not long for it? Surely nothing could be more delightful than to serve him whom our soul loves. Our divine Lord may have had regard to this wish when he said: 'As long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me' (Matt. xxv 40). If we live by faith we need not deem ourselves less happy than Martha; for in our brothers, our sisters, we can see our Lord and Saviour

and consider that he accepts everything we do to them, every service, even the very smallest, that we render them, as if it were done to himself. Oh! what treasures of merit we should gather, how we should increase in love, if only we accustomed ourselves to see in our neighbour the Lord and Master himself! Let us endeavour to obtain this happy custom and then greater peace and richer reward will be ours."

Mother Clare put this teaching into practice throughout her whole life. Who is the Founder of her "little school"? Is it not the poor Child Jesus whom she saw and loved in the poor children? How well she understood the art of kindling the love of the divine Child in the hearts of the children! And her love had that special quality of true love: it did not shrink back from ugliness, from faults, from dirt and misery. Such children reminded her more particularly "of the Saviour who for love of them left the glory of heaven, and descending to the misery of earth became as a leper!"

How beautifully this love is expressed in the Meditation on *The little leper of St Elizabeth*, with the text: "As long as you did it to one of these my least brethren you did it to me."

The divine Child in the children! That is the great thought of the Foundress of the Congregation of the Poor Child Jesus, the thought to which she refers ever again and again. How full of thought is her explanation of those words of the divine Redeemer: "He that shall receive one such little one in my name receiveth me" (Matt. xviii 5). "Oh! who would not deem themselves happy in receiving the Lord Jesus, receiving him, the almighty, the most lovable, the most worthy of all love! Who would not wish for such happiness, who would not long for it with ardent desire!

"To-day our divine Lord tells us that we can, indeed, receive him: 'He that shall receive one such little one in my name receiveth me.' To receive the Lord! What a

grace! and this grace can truly be ours, for opportunity of receiving a poor child is never wanting to us; only let us be mindful of doing it in the name of Jesus. The poor, especially poor children, are our Lord's dearest friends: he loves them to such a degree as to look upon all that is done to them as done to himself. Must we not, therefore, love and honour them also? The exterior of a beggar, of a poor child, has often something frightening in it to the worldly minded; for hidden beneath miserable rags are often poor wretched limbs covered with open sores! But let us examine carefully whether beneath these rags, these miseries, our divine Lord himself is not concealed! Many a saint has thus discovered him; for the saints see very clearly with the eyes of the soul, and under the form of a poor ragged beggar our Lord has often appeared to them. Happy they who did not despise the beggar, for great was the treasure awaiting them!"

But this point is not wanting in difficulties. It is true, we are really sincere with regard to our love for Jesus; but regarding the living image of Jesus it is not always an easy matter! It need not be enmity, it can be a certain natural antipathy, or a rebuke, a hard word, perhaps only a thoughtless, imprudent word, and our love for Jesus comes to a sudden stand-still! It seems impossible to us to overcome ourselves at once.

May we give way to such a disposition? Let us listen to Mother Clare in a Meditation on the words: "Heart of Jesus, shedding the last drop of thy blood on the Cross, have mercy on us!"

"When our divine Lord asks a sign, a proof of our love, he says: 'By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another' (John xiii 35). Let us take these words well to heart. If our love for the Redeemer is to be real and true, we must love our neighbour, and that sincerely; and we may not exclude one single person from our love. Our divine Redeemer shed his Heart's Blood for all, also for the very least among

men. . . . May we then exclude *one* from our love? Should we not first have to exclude ourselves from the Heart of Jesus?

" If we desire to dwell in this Sacred Heart, if we desire to find peace in this wondrous ' place of rest,' we must permit all others to dwell there with us. Let us be on our guard against all coldness and aloofness, against every little antipathy. Never let us say, ' I have nothing against her, but I leave her alone, I do not trouble myself about her.' Could not the loving Saviour reply to us: ' I have shed my Blood for this soul, and thou sayest, " I do not trouble myself about her !" ' It is our Lord's wish that we love one another heartily; therefore it is not sufficient to say: ' I pray for this or that one, but it is not necessary to speak with her, and she is cold towards me.' Is this the language learnt in the Heart of Jesus? Are we not afraid that our divine Lord might withdraw his sacred Presence from us and let us wander along the paths of aridity, in the land where no water is (Ps. lxii 3) when we speak thus? Do we not thereby show ourselves colder towards him than our neighbour is towards us?

" Let us give heed to the words of St Francis de Sales, who says that we must seek our neighbour in the Heart of Jesus, and there we must love him. In Holy Communion our Lord gives us his precious Blood, the blood of his Sacred Heart. May this sacred Blood inflame us with ardent love for him and with generous love for our neighbour! ' Heart of Jesus, of whose fulness we have all received, have mercy on us!' " And again she exhorts: " O my soul, thou mayest not realise it, yet nevertheless it is true: thou dost aim many a blow at the Heart of thy Lord and Saviour! It is perfect truth, my soul, that each offence, each painful word inflicted upon thy neighbour pierces the Heart of thy Lord. Every act of impatience, every unkindness or roughness of manner is felt by thy Lord before it reaches thy neighbour. In this point he is indescribably tender. Did he not say in his

infinite love: ' He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of my eye ' (Zach. ii 8). If thou didst but know, my soul, how deeply the Lord hides thy neighbour in his Heart! And though thy neighbour may be imperfect, nevertheless the All-Merciful carries him deep, deep in his inmost Heart in order to sanctify him; and thou must pierce the Heart of thy Spouse before thou canst reach thy neighbour with an offence or a painful word. In truth, thou shouldst not permit a wilful censure of others even in thy thoughts if thou wilt not pain or wound thy Lord."

There is no other place—as far as I know—where the revered Mother speaks more earnestly. She knows that the love of one's neighbour can prepare difficulties even for those who sincerely desire to serve their Lord faithfully; but with regard to this point our love for the pierced Heart of the all-loving Spouse must make us more noble-hearted. She who dwells in the Heart of Jesus, who constantly thinks of Jesus, will not give way to oversensitiveness or touchiness; her heart will aspire higher, she will be above such little things. How truly noble did the revered Foundress show herself in the great difficulties of her life, when not only she herself was in question, but that work also which she treasured beyond life! But Jesus was her staff of support; and in his Sacred Heart she loved those also who had caused her pain; deep, sharp pain!

As a rule, it is only trifles that make difficulties for us regarding our neighbour. Let us generously overlook such things; let us forget all, bury all in the Heart of Jesus, and love each and all in that same divine Heart! And because all belong to Jesus, our love must be the same towards all, we must not judge, nor measure, nor prefer. No, as Jesus loves and died for all, so also must we love all. Otherwise, our love would be only natural love, which is attracted and drawn by exterior qualities. He who loves in the Heart of Jesus, in the spirit of the

" Practice," in the sacramental Love, loves in all the image of Christ !

If we would *prefer* anybody let it be those towards whom we feel an antipathy. It was thus the revered Mother acted. Further, let us prefer the poor—the poorest children were Mother Clare's favourites. Finally, let us prefer sinners, the poorest of the poor ! But it is evident that this is just where the difficulty lies; yet it is not beyond us. Let us help ourselves with the thought that they are members of Christ, disfigured and distorted, it is true, even lifeless; but a sinner has often become a saint ! This thought was undoubtedly in the mind of Mother Clare when she referred to the unutterable meekness with which the divine Redeemer accepted the kiss of treachery from the apostate disciple. Let us with her learn this virtue from the adorable, all-merciful Saviour !

And she was helped by one great thought; namely, to be kind and good to those who are unkind to us; yea, even to those who hate us and wish us harm. She says: " If we would accustom ourselves at every offence, whether little or great, not to look at the person who offers the offence but to direct our gaze upwards to the heavenly Father in whose loving hand the offender is an instrument, we should, indeed, bear with humility and patience whatever others may do to us; bitterness would be unknown, and our heart would be like the honeycomb which, pierced and cut, gives forth nothing but sweetness. In the convent and in the world we can, with our atoning prayers and our little self-conquests and acts of mortification, help those poor miserable creatures for whom Jesus was scourged and torn. Oh ! this silent prayer and suffering, how it will one day be manifested to the whole world ! Who knows if our quiet prayer, and still more our silent patience, was not the arrow of love which penetrated the divine Heart of Jesus and effected the conversion of a forsaken sinner on his bed of death ! (Of course, we

cannot say anything for certain, but we may hope for much, very much, from the infinite love of the all-loving Saviour.) Who knows what may depend upon our love towards our neighbour ! Let us then be very tender and loving in this respect towards the adorable Heart of Jesus who has loved us with a special love."

VIII

HOW THE MOTHER OF GOD, THE ANGELS, AND SAINTS TEACH US TO "PRACTISE"

We intend to do great things! We desire to draw close to Jesus, even to dwell constantly in his Heart! Our day's work is to be a constant Communion, after the example of Mother Clare; and we desire to see Jesus everywhere, in prayer, in our work, in intercourse with our neighbour. Is not that something great? But may we poor sinners really become so familiar with Jesus? It is true, he is the Babe, the Infant Jesus of Bethlehem; but this Child is also the holy and just God who will one day be our Judge! Nevertheless, with holy fearlessness we may say that it does not make us uneasy, for we know who it is that will lead us to him! We know what all the saints have taught in this respect, and we know what Mother Clare teaches us also. Let us listen to her: "He who desires to find our Lord must seek him with Mary, for the Child is never without his Mother. They who desire to receive graces from the divine Babe need only to ask Mary, because the Babe does everything his Mother wishes." "Then let us go to Mary frequently, constantly. Doubtless, we greet her a hundred times in a day; but let it be with devotion and attention. And when we say: 'Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now,' let us remember that she is mighty enough to give Jesus to us at every moment. And when we say: 'Pray for us sinners at the hour of our death,' let us be mindful that she has power to show us in that last hour Jesus, the blessed Fruit of her womb; whereby even the terrors of death must be dispelled."

Let us then go constantly to this powerful Mother, and let us also strive to learn from Mother Clare how to

meditate on Mary. How touching is the Meditation for May 8 (the date of her death) where she says: "With Mary we can find Jesus. Even now she can show him to us, as much as our weak powers can support, just as she showed him to the shepherds and to the Wise Kings. Oh! to how many souls has Mary shown their Lord beneath the sacramental veil! . . . and such souls now believe more firmly in their God hidden in the Blessed Sacrament than if they saw him with their bodily eyes.

"Yes, Mary can even now show us the blessed Fruit of her womb; but what will it be when we close the eyes of our body for ever on the things of this world, and in that same moment when those around us say, 'She is gone!' Mary calls to us: 'Behold your Lord and God, in whom you believed, in whom you hoped, whom you loved, for whom you have so long yearned!' Oh! what that bliss will be, eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor human heart conceived! Dost thou not desire, my soul, to partake in this immeasurable happiness? Then cry to Mary: 'Show unto us Jesus!' cry daily, hourly: 'Show unto us Jesus!' and this grace will be given to thee also. Amen."

In this devotion to Mary there is one thing of special importance to us. Mother Clare honours Mary as Mother of our Lord hidden in the Blessed Sacrament, as guide to the sacramental Saviour.

How clearly this beautiful connection refers to the fact that in two successive years, 1846 and 1847, during the whole of the month of May, she gave her spiritual daughters meditation points on the Litany of the Blessed Sacrament. Simply and unpretentiously she explains her intention to them, on May 1, 1846: "The fruit of devotion to Mary is growth in the love of Jesus; and we cannot give the divine Mother a greater joy than this, to love her adorable Son ever more and more and with our whole heart. Therefore, during this month we will, to the best of our powers, meditate on the Mystery of Love, the Blessed Sacrament

of the Altar; for from this divine Sacrament burst forth those flames of love which enkindle and inflame every heart that approaches it with longing desire."

Then she proceeds with the preparation, to " consider that in this most holy Sacrament the Son of the Virgin is really and truly present; and as he was with his Mother so will he also be with us." The Meditations of the " May series " of 1847 which explain the Litany of the Blessed Sacrament, very often close with a prayer to Mary, " the true Ark of the Covenant which preserved for us the Manna foreshadowed of old." It was through Mary that Mother Clare desired to go to Jesus.

Yes, Mary the Virgin Mother, the spotless Mother of God, led the virgin Clare to Jesus and made her the mother of many virgins. Without Mary there would have been no Congregation of the Poor Child Jesus; and it is Mary who will preserve in it at all times the spirit of Jesus. Mary must lead us to Jesus, even from the early morning. Our first thought on waking should be: " To-day I am going to Holy Communion; help me, O Mother, to prepare a worthy dwelling for thy Son." Jesus and Mary ! With these two sacred names I begin the day. Mary opens for me the little heaven on earth, the tabernacle. With Mary I adore Jesus; and when I leave the sacramental Presence, I strive to work with Mary and her divine Child. When I recollect myself it is: " Jesus and Mary !"

The " Practice " gives us a special reason for uniting ourselves with Mary, for she was the great instructress of the revered Mother. It was in the heart of the most Blessed Virgin that Mother Clare learnt her " Practice." " Mary kept all these words, pondering them in her heart " (Luke ii 19).

" Mary spoke little with man, but much and uninterruptedly with her God; and she preserved carefully in her heart the treasures which her divine Son communicated to her in quiet colloquy. All interior souls do the

same. They make no outward show, they like to be silent; and it is only when charity demands it that they communicate to others that which the divine Master confides to them; for they know that self-love seeks ever to find its nourishment, even in the most holy things. 'My secret is mine,' says St Bernard. Such souls show little outwardly, but great is the treasure they preserve in their heart where the Beloved communicates himself to them."

As far as I know, Mother Clare has never represented the deep and real essence of the "Practice" more beautifully than in the Meditation for the feast of our Lady of Mount Carmel (1849), which was especially dear to her on account of St Teresa, her first mistress in the art of recollection. The title she gives is "The thoughts of the most blessed Virgin," and the text: "My sister, my spouse, is a garden enclosed, a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed up" (Cant. iv 12).

"From the first moment of her conception till her last breath, Mary had but one thought, a single, simple thought, but at the same time infinitely grand and unspeakably sublime. She was that garden enclosed, that fountain sealed up, into which nothing could penetrate but this one thought. The thought of Mary was the Lord! Her entire being, her every thought, her every wish was in him, with him, and through him; apart from him she knew nothing, heard and saw nothing. Or what was her thought from the first moment of her conception? Was it not the cry of longing desire: 'Come, Lord, come and delay no longer'? Oh! that thou wouldst rend the heavens and wouldst come down" (Isa. lxiv 1).

"Verily, all the longing of mankind during 4,000 years was united in Mary, and she had no other thought than the coming Redeemer. And when the Lord descended from heaven and effected in her the wondrous mystery of the Incarnation, how marvellously was she united with him, with her God, who rested beneath

her heart! And as the Babe lay in the Crib, Mary was constantly occupied with him alone, and everything she did was for him. When she fled to Egypt, she carried her treasure in her arms and could think of nothing but him. And when the Lord lived beneath one roof with her for thirty years, what did Mary do, of what did she think during this time? She worked for her Lord and God, she lived only for him, she thought only of him; she could not possibly do otherwise. And later, as she followed her divine Son even to the Cross of Calvary, oh! how her heart was occupied with him then! How did Cross and thorns, and nails, and spear lay siege to the enclosed garden of her heart and surround it like a strong wall, even till the last moment of her life, until after uninterrupted yearning and desire, one last sigh of love carried her to the eternal embraces of her Beloved."

It would be good to apply to ourselves the earnest application which the revered Mother makes here, when she says: "And what do we do? What do we think? A hundred useless thoughts, and then, maybe, a thought of our Lord; the whole day full of thoughts of ourselves and our own interests; or of idle fancies perhaps, and then at night we are glad to be able to say: 'Oh! I did sometimes think of our Lord.' O spouse of Christ, can you call that life? Is that fidelity when the Bridegroom has to take the second place? He, the Lord, is thine, he has given himself to thee; his Sacrament is thine, all his Blood and his wounds are thine, his immeasurable love is thine; all that is his, is thine; he never leaves thy side, and thou—oh! thou hast only a few lukewarm thoughts for him! Woe to us, O Lord, if thou shalt enter into judgement with us! (Ps. cxlii 2).

"Therefore, let us begin, and let no one lose courage. We have not yet made such progress that no useless thought presents itself to us; but we must strive constantly and patiently to keep our thoughts for God alone. As often as we become aware that our mind is directed to other

things and not to our Lord, or to the vocation to which he has called us, we should quietly and gradually lead our thoughts back to him, and to the duties of our vocation in him. Our loving Saviour will then look upon our good will and grant us the unspeakable grace of having but one single and simple thought, viz., he himself who is all our love!" Thus the revered Mother presents to us the ideal of the "Practice" in Mary, and teaches us, with earnest words, how to follow her example who is the mirror of all virtues.

Mary was entirely absorbed in Jesus. No one resembled the divine Redeemer as his holy Mother did. And what is the whole aim of the "Practice"? Resemblance to Jesus! Mary thought always of Jesus. And what does the "Practice" demand of us? Constant thought of Jesus. Mary loved the whole human race in Jesus. What does the "Practice" say here? That we should love God in all. Finally, the "Practice" demands progress. What was the life of Mary? It was constant, wondrous progress, without ceasing, without interruption. We must not picture the life of Mary to ourselves as a life of repose, a life borne along by grace, a partaking of divine grace. No, it was because she was conceived without stain of sin, because she had more grace, and therefore, more love than all, that Mary worked and laboured more than all.

The "Practice" was Mary's great and constant work. Every act of her soul was an act of love, each new act grander than the one that preceded it; so that the Cherubim and Seraphim found in every new flame of love a new and glorious world full of beauty and love. Let us then, in the "Practice," keep close to Mary. Let us, with Mother Clare, ask ourselves: "How would my Saviour, how would Mary and Joseph have acted in my place? Oh! if we could but accustom ourselves to go frequently to the little house of Nazareth, how we should learn to pray and to work! How we should learn that

even eating, drinking, and sleeping can become entirely sanctified and pleasing to God !"

Let us say with the psalmist (cxv 7): " I am thy servant and the son of thy handmaid "—of her who in the Gospel expressly calls herself his handmaid. Next to Mary, the patron of the " Practice " is St Joseph, whom the revered Mother so tenderly honoured. She calls this glorious Patron " the great Master of the spiritual life," and for the Meditation on this title she chooses the text: " The meditation of my heart shall be always in thy sight " (Ps. xviii 15). " The inner life of the saints consists in the constant recollection of the spirit before the eyes of God. The meditation of their heart being always in his sight, they walk before the Invisible as though they saw him, and in all the distractions of their state and vocation their inmost heart remains recollected before God, burning in the ardour of love both day and night, as the lamp before the All-Holy, the Most High."

" But in this science of the saints no one ever attained to such perfection as Joseph, the man according to God's heart, who drew love and life at the very source of all life. . . . What could have distracted him in his exterior surroundings ? His work ? Surely not; for did he not work with his Lord and God ? Or his family whom he saw round him ? Oh ! his family consisted of Jesus and Mary themselves: Jesus, the Highest Good, and Mary, the ' singular Vessel of devotion.' Or perhaps the conversations which he heard ? These conversations were for him a source of light; for he who had come down from heaven enlightened him concerning the Kingdom of God. Undoubtedly, St Joseph had reached the highest perfection in the spiritual life. Even in his exterior life of such exceeding simplicity, he had reached the highest degree of interior contemplation and constant recollection which nothing was able to take from him. . . . Then let us learn from our glorious Father, St Joseph, how to pray and how to love Jesus and Mary."

We will now turn our thoughts to the *holy angels*, who are in such close connection with both parts of the "Practice." First, they contemplate at all times the face of the Father who is in heaven—the presence of God being their heaven, their bliss; then they burn with love for the Sacramental God of the tabernacle and hover in adoration around his altars. It is not pious imagination alone when, at altars and tabernacles, figures of adoring angels invite the faithful to adoration. Like St Chrysostom, the eucharistic teacher, Mother Clare was fond of contemplating the angels who surround the "Altar Throne." In one of the eucharistic Meditations she says: . . . "Without doubt, when the divine King descends upon our altar, multitudes of the heavenly inhabitants descend with him, and, like bees, hover round the heavenly flower sprung from Jesse's root. In that adorable flower they find the sweetness of honey; for our Bread is sweet—sweeter, we could almost say, than the Bread of Heaven!

"'Bread of Angels, have mercy on us!' for thou desirest to nourish us as thou dost the heavenly spirits. Oh! would that we had the love of the Cherubim and Seraphim, that we might praise thee and bless thee! We long for the love of the highest spirits of heaven, but even that, dearest Lord, is not a sufficient return for thy love. What then can we poor sinners do but acknowledge our utter incapability, our utter helplessness? Come thou to our aid, O holy and Immaculate Virgin!"

The angels, and especially our guardian angels, are most willing to help us with regard to the "Practice." When we pray in solitude of heart it is their delight to visit us; they surround and protect us, for we practise then the same holy occupation as they, who always see the face of the heavenly Father.

Finally, we will turn our thoughts to *the saints*, particularly the favourite saints of the revered Mother. What beautiful meditations has she left to her daughters

on these friends of God! And how in them does she return again and again to her " one thought !"

St Agnes carries a lamb in her arms, as emblem of purity, and of her the revered Mother says: " Thus does she bear in her heart the Lamb of God, and the presence of her Beloved makes her strong against all other love. Through this union with her Lord and Master she participates in the purity, the innocence of the Lamb of God. . . . Then let us approach and receive the Lamb who, in order to unite himself most intimately with us, gives us himself as food ! Let us receive the divine Lamb and preserve it in our heart, and—according to the words of St Francis de Sales—we shall become all beautiful and pure and good, while receiving and adoring him who is beauty, goodness and purity itself."

St Francis de Sales, according to the testimony of St Jane Frances de Chantal, " was one with our Lord; the divine Master lived in him, he worked in him, and through him. ' Father, the glory which thou hast given me, I have given to them; that they may be one as we also are one. I in them and thou in me " (John xvii 22-23).

Mother Clare was always enthusiastic regarding those words, which the divine Redeemer addressed to *St Catherine of Siena :* " Think of me and I will think of thee." She says: " These words are spoken, are offered, to those who will accept them. And who would not accept them ? Is not this the happiest, the most profitable exchange ? All that we have to do is to forget ourselves and think with love of our divine Lord, not troubling ourselves about anything but that the name of the Beloved may be glorified, his honour promoted, and as far as lies in our power, souls won to his service, and his love made everywhere known. Then we can leave all care of ourselves to him; commending ourselves with sure trust to his keeping.

" Let us not be foolish, but let us accept the offer which the divine Lord and Master makes to us, his poor and needy children. Is it not infinitely better to be protected

and guided by the all-seeing eyes of God than to trust to our own shortsightedness? Our divine Lord asks only that we be mindful of him, and then he will relieve us of all care for ourselves. And who would not gladly be mindful of the most lovable, the most beautiful of the sons of men? (Ps xliv 3). Who would not gladly keep him before their eyes and be mindful of him hourly, yes, constantly? To whom would it not be sweet to love him? To whom would it not be a delight to work and to suffer for him? And this is all that the loving Redeemer requires of us, offering in return to take the entire care of us upon himself."

In the Meditation on "The Treasure of *St Antony of Padua*," Mother Clare compares this saint with the Sister of the Poor Child Jesus. The saint carries on his arm that poor Child who is the treasure, the entire riches of heaven and earth: the Sister receives in every poor child the same divine Child who, although Lord of heaven and earth, dwells beneath one roof with her, hidden in the lowly tabernacle on the altar; and if she only holds her heart open to him in longing and in love, she will experience his sacred Presence every hour, every moment of the day. With regard to *St Aloysius*, "the lily of the valley" (Cant. ii 1), she praises his purity, but still more "his wondrous recollection of spirit, his being entirely absorbed in God, his intimate and constant union with his Lord and Master, which indeed are unique." "It was from this root that the glorious lily blossomed." . . . "Let us not lose courage, but always begin anew; and as often as we feel ourselves distracted let us turn back to the sweet presence of our God; and the divine Master will reward our work and our fidelity, and will at last impart to us the grace of being mindful of him at every moment."

The Meditation on "the resting-place of *St Mary Magdalen*" is indeed a masterpiece. Three times we find the holy penitent at the feet of our Lord: as repenting sinner in the house of Simon, the leper; at her own house

when she listened to the words of the divine Master; and at the Supper at Bethania, when she anointed the feet of the Redeemer just before his Passion. And still a fourth time we find her in her chosen place. When the feet of the divine Master were fastened to the Cross, we see the holy penitent kneeling in anguish, nailed also, by love, to the "Tree of Shame." At the feet of the risen Saviour we again find her. "May we also attain to this degree of love where we know nothing but Jesus alone, Jesus the Crucified (1 Cor. ii 2); where we give up ourselves entirely and are only intent on honouring him, loving him, and glorifying him; where he is our only thought, the only desire of our heart."

"Then let us be faithful; let us seek to find our resting-place at his feet; let us return to those sacred feet at all times and at every opportunity; so that at last nothing may be able to tear us from them, for we also are invited to the resting-place of St Mary Magdalen." The happiness of the house at Bethania drew from the revered Mother the wish: "Would that Jesus might be our household Friend!" And immediately she says with holy assurance: "He desires this, the infinitely merciful Lord; he desires to be all in all to us, and therefore also our household Friend!" Referring to *St Alphonsus*, she praises the fidelity of his long life of ninety years, which was supported by two special aids, viz., "burning love for the Blessed Sacrament, and tender, childlike love for Mary, the Mother of divine grace." "Let us also make use of these immeasurable graces, and strive with constant zeal to increase our love for the adorable Sacrament of the altar and for the ever Blessed Virgin, and our progress will be secured."

We have already spoken of the Monstrance of *St Clare*, of the Staff of *St Gertrude*, and of the Viaticum of *St Stanislaus*. *St Francis of Assisi* was also especially loved by Mother Clare, and those words of his: "My God and my all!" seized upon her soul, as it were, with great

power. It is natural, in her love for *St Teresa*, that she should speak with the highest praise of her interior recollection. She delighted also in speaking of "the glorious Father *St Joseph*" as her Master in the art of recollection.

"O my soul, thou hast the same means in hand as the saints had. . . . Thy God is in thee as he was in them!"

IX

BLESSING OF THE " PRACTICE "

After all that has been said, it is easy to understand that the " Practice " is the sure way to the highest perfection, to union with God. When the author of *The Life of Mother Clare* (Rev. O. Pfulf, S.J.) speaks of the high degree of her union with God, he makes the important remark (p. 345): " Of course, the fact must not be overlooked that such a manner of union is a special and extraordinary gift of grace which cannot be merited by our fidelity alone, but which may be aspired to and longed for by the faithful soul, if so it be pleasing to God." Here we must consider each word: The faithful soul will perceive that, contrary to her merits, she may hope all things; she will recognise the truth of those words of St Teresa, quoted by Mother Clare: " If you are faithful in thus walking before the Lord and with him, you will in consequence never again be able to drive him from you;" and with the revered Mother she will yearningly sigh: " Oh ! would that the happy moment were already here !"

The blessing of the " Practice !" How much could still be written ! Is not the life of the revered Mother, erected as it was on the " Practice," the best proof of the abundant blessings of the same ? Once again let us listen to Mother Clare. In the year 1846, in a meditation, she explained the Proverb (iii 6). " In all thy ways think on him; and he will direct thy steps." She says: " The most excellent means of attaining to perfection consists in walking before God and with God. They who strive to be mindful of the presence of God, will find great strength in this thought and help in every need.

What could be more able to preserve us from sin than the thought that we stand before the All-Holy? Or what could be more able to strengthen us in temptations and struggles than when we remind ourselves that he is at our side who holds all the weapons for our defence in his hand? What could be more able to strengthen us in all virtues than the remembrance of God's presence? By this remembrance *faith* is strengthened, for we shall know our Lord better the oftener we look at him; *hope* is increased by the firm conviction that he will protect us beneath his wings (Ps. xvi 8); *charity* is enkindled by the knowledge that our God, our Highest Good, desires to be in us and with us. "Can a man hide fire in his bosom, and his garments not burn?" (Prov. vi 27).

But our divine Lord is wont to take those souls beneath his *special care* who strive to be mindful of him at all times. Let us often think of the words quoted above, which our Lord spoke to St Catherine of Siena: "Think thou of me and I will think of thee." What then have we to trouble about? We need only direct our eyes towards him, and even before we ask it, help is at hand. Oh! let us not neglect so great a treasure! Only let us be faithful, and experience will teach us how good the Lord is to the soul that seeks him (Lam. iii 25).

Giving St Aloysius as example, the revered Mother described a few beautiful effects of this constant recollection in God. She says: "From this interior spirit came, undoubtedly, that wonderful ardour of love for his God whom he loved ever more and more the nearer he approached him; from this spirit came also his deep humility, which he drew from intercourse with him who humbled himself even to the death of the Cross; and from it came likewise his unconquerable meekness, imparted to him by the presence of the Lamb of God. From this spirit came that love of mortification whereby the lily surrounded itself with thorns, the thorns of the Crucified; and from this spirit of recollection came especially that wonderful

purity and tender conscientiousness which gave him a horror of all sin."

St Mary Magdalen of Pazzi once cried out in ecstasy: "Oh! how great is the glory of St Aloysius! And"—continued the saint—"St Aloysius is so great a saint because he worked interiorly."

But the most beautiful thought is that the "Practice" proceeds from love, the love that was "to the end" (St John xiii 1), the sacramental love; and it inflames this love ever more and more. Finally, it is nothing else than the practice of real, true love of God—the greatest act that a poor human being can perform, the weak answer of the creature to the infinite power of God's love. "Lovest thou me more than these?" "Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee" (John xxi 16). "Who does not hear the voice of the Lord in the most holy Sacrament, speaking to the soul about to draw near to him: 'Lovest thou me?' and the answer of the soul 'My God, my only Good, how could I help loving thee? I love thee, thou most lovely, most beautiful, thou peerless One! I love thee, yea, I swear to thee that I love thee! I love thee more than myself, more than my life! I will go with thee even to death! I will give my life for thee!'" The "Practice" is love! The Practice brings recollection, which is walking before God; and constant adoration, which is unceasing love of God.

"But there is one thing we must not overlook," says Mother Clare: "Incense of itself has no perfume, it must first be thrown into fire. And in the same way our prayer has no value unless it be thrown into the flames of love of the Heart of Jesus, by which alone it can ascend as a pleasing sacrifice to God."

This is the blessing of the "Practice": it throws all—prayer, intercourse with one's neighbour, work and suffering—into the burning love of that Heart of infinite love, making of all a sacrifice of love pleasing to God. It was

thus with Mother Clare, it will be thus with us. This is the way of true perfection, of sanctity. "Do this and thou shalt live." Yet no, it will be no longer thou that livest, but, as with Mother Clare, Jesus and Mary will live in thee!

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